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METHUEN'S ENGLISH CLASSICS

VICTORIAN NARRATIVE POEMS

MORTE D'ARTHUR
SOHRAB AND RUSTUM
SAUL
GOBLIN MARKET

Edited by
C. M. DYSON, B.A., B.LITT.



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INTRODUCTION

THE age of Queen Victoria is one comparable to the great Elizabethan age in the vitality and splendour of its literary achievements both in poetry and prose. Among the poets of this period Tennyson (1809-92) and Browning (1812-89) stand out pre-eminently. For more than half a century Tennyson held the attention of the public with the brilliance of his poetical skill and his power of interpreting the age to itself. Browning, coming to fame later, never had the wide public of Tennyson but, nevertheless, was regarded by his own readers with intense admiration both as a poet and thinker. His style was too difficult, the workings of his mind too rapid and subtle for ready popularity. Chesterton said of him that he was fitter to deepen the Victorian mind than to broaden it.

This latter function was reserved for Matthew Arnold (1822-88), who, both in his poetry and prose, is representative of the finest culture of his time. He set himself firmly against eccentricity and insularity in literature. In his critical writings of which the most famous is *Essays in Criticism*, he shows the widest interest in the literature of other ages and other lands, believing that a true culture is one that is based on the best that has been done and thought in all times. His poetry has the dignity and sincerity arising from such an attitude; his narrative poems, particularly, show everywhere both in their style and subject-matter, the effect of his wide reading of great poets of the past.

No volume claiming to represent Victorian poetry in

however small a way would be complete without an example from the work of the group of artists and writers who called themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Among the chief of these were the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the artists Millais and Holman Hunt. Powerful allies later associated with the movement were William Morris and Swinburne. Influenced perhaps by John Ruskin, they greatly admired the work of the Italian painters before Raphael and determined to paint in what they believed to be their spirit. They thought that the artist should take his inspiration direct from nature and express himself spontaneously and naturally as his feelings dictated. Beauty of form and colour, sincerity and a minute and loving observation of nature are characteristic of the work of the Pre-Raphaelites both in poetry and painting. Their movement was an important revolt against the ugliness and materialism of the industrial civilization of the mid-Victorian period, particularly as it showed itself in the decay of the fine arts and crafts and in the hideousness of architecture, household decoration, and furniture. The work of the Pre-Raphaelites at first went unnoticed, but in 1862 there appeared *Goblin Market*, a small volume of poetry by Christina Rossetti, the sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who himself did two black and white illustrations for the book. By the sincerity of the lyrical poems and the colour and music of the title poem this volume attracted general attention not only to its author's work but to that of her brother and the Pre-Raphaelites as a whole. The poet Swinburne later said that it was Christina Rossetti who 'led their hosts to victory'.

Just twenty years before the appearance of *Goblin*

Market, Tennyson had published his poem, *Morte d'Arthur* (1842). From his youth Tennyson had wished to write a national epic poem celebrating the life and times of King Arthur and concentrating in the figure of the King himself the virtues of the good and faithful ruler, the model of the true Christian knight as he was understood in the Victorian age. In describing the life of Arthur, his wisdom and goodness were for a certain time to prevail only to be conquered in the end by evil and treachery from within his own household and kingdom. This plan Tennyson realized in a series of poems, *Idylls of the King*, which in his role of poet laureate, he dedicated to Queen Victoria. The fragment, *Morte d'Arthur*, which in the completed version of the *Idylls of the King* appears late in the story as part of *The Passing of Arthur* (see Notes, p. 98), was actually written some years earlier than the other poems and is, perhaps, the finest of the whole cycle and representative of Tennyson's narrative poetry at its best.

Tennyson was heir to much that was good in the poetry of the Romantic writers who had gone before him. He had their understanding of nature and capacity for minute observation of her beauties, their love of splendid colour and sound, their varied metres and skill in narrative. Like Coleridge and Keats, in telling a story, Tennyson knew how to create the atmosphere by unerring choice of detail in his description of the background. In sympathy with the tragic theme the scene in *Morte d'Arthur* is desolate. The wounded King is carried to

A chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land,
set near a wintry sea among the mountains.

The huge dim figure of Sir Bedivere stands out in sombre relief as he moves swiftly to and fro across this desolate scene.

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.

How brightly Arthur's sword glows in contrast to the gloom which surrounds it and gathers to itself for a moment all that is left of the colour and magnificence of the old happy days at Camelot.

For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery.

Dramatically, in a blaze of light, Excalibur disappears.

The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur. •

The description of the gentle beauty of Avilion is exquisitely drawn to fit in with the melancholy scene of Arthur's passing. Here is no bright, triumphant heaven but a peaceful land whose soothing loveliness can heal the 'grievous wounds' of mind and body.

In the same manner as with his pictures, the characteristic sounds which accompany the descriptions of the

background and action of his story, are all sensitively attuned to help in creating the successive emotional or dramatic effects. The story opens with the ominous noise of battle rolling among the mountains and closes quietly, when all the strain and agony is over, with the line:

And on the Mere the wailing died away.

At moments the lines echo to the ring of armour on hard rocks or to the unearthly sorrow of the three queens:

And from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Perhaps the most effectively used sound in the poem and one that returns hauntingly to the memory, is a still small sound, the ripple of the water among the reeds of the lake. That gentle, inevitable refrain conquers Sir Bedivere more surely than the power of armies.

Subtle the language of this poem may be; but the plot is a simple one. The first movement centres round the contest of wills between Arthur and Sir Bedivere in which Arthur prevails, and the sword is cast back into the mere. The second scene describes with melancholy beauty Arthur's strained efforts to reach the lake, his parting words to Sir Bedivere and his final disappearance in the barge with the three fair queens.

The language is at once dignified and rich. Almost every line has its individual beauties of metaphor,

picture, or sound. Tennyson was a master in his use of onomatopoeia. Not only does he make the sound of his words enhance their sense but he adds a further effect by making one group of such words succeed a contrasting group. Take the lines:

Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

Here the alliteration in 'sea-wind sang', the sharp, difficult consonants and thin emphatic vowels of 'shrill, chill, with flakes of foam' and 'zig-zag paths and juts of pointed rock' contrast with the quiet liquid consonants of the last line:

the shining levels of the lake.

So the very sounds point the contrast between the rocky promontory, difficult to traverse, and the tranquil beauty of the lake. An even more elaborate contrast is effected in a similar way in the lines quoted later (p. 7) describing Sir Bedivere's journey across the rocks, carrying the dying King.

This rich language has no need of rhyme. The blank verse line is used throughout. To please the ear and avoid monotonous regularity, the pattern of the blank verse line is skilfully varied from time to time. Tennyson uses his variations to help him in gaining other effects both of meaning and music. Let us examine the following lines.

Dry clashed | his har|ness in | the i|cy caves
 And bār|ren chāsms, | and all | to left | and right
 The bare | black cliff| clang'd round | him as | he based
 His feet | on juts | of slip|pery crag | that rang
 Sharp smit|ten with | the dint | of arm|ed heels—
 And on | a sud|den lo! | the lev|el lake,
 And the | long glo|ries of | the win|ter moon.

Here the second line is in regular blank verse, that is the ten syllables of the line are spoken in a rhythm where unstressed and stressed syllables alternate regularly. In the first line, however, the pattern is varied by a reversal of the stress in the first foot and the word 'dry' describing the peculiarly harsh sound of the crash, is emphasized. In the third foot of the third line, 'clang'd' appropriately takes the emphasis with 'round' as secondary. In the second foot, there are two heavily stressed syllables, 'black' and 'cliff', and the emphasis is further increased by the alliteration in the words 'bare' and 'black'. Compensating for the heavy words in the second and third feet, the fourth foot consists of two unstressed words. The fourth and sixth lines are regular while the fifth has a very effective variation in the first foot and the seventh in the first and second.

In interesting and flexible blank verse, the position of the full stops and of the main pauses in the sense, varies considerably, for it would be monotonous if sentences always ended with the end of the line. Tennyson runs on his sense from line to line, and very frequently puts his main pauses within the line instead of at the end.

For example, the major rhetorical pause in the lines just quoted above is after 'Lo!', while the whole seven lines form a natural block ending at 'moon'. So in the lines:

He heard the deep behind him and a cry
Before. His own thoughts drove him like a goad,

the sense runs over the first line to be abruptly and effectively halted at the end of the first foot of the next line. Nothing is easier than to multiply examples from Tennyson of peculiar felicities in variation of rhythm and pause. One more must suffice:

For all | the haft | twinkled | with dia|mond sparks
Myriads | of to|paz lights | and ja|cinth works
Of subt|lest jew|ellery. | He gazed | so long
That both | his eyes | were daz|zled, as | he stood,
This way | and that | divi|ding the | swift mind,
In act | to throw: | but at | the last | it seem'd
Better | to leave | Excal|ibur | concealed |
There in | the man|y-knot|ted wa|ter flags
That whis|tled stiff | and dry | about | the marge.
So strode | he back | slow to | the woun|ded King.

All the six marked variations of pattern in these lines serve to emphasize the meaning. 'Myriads' are held up to our wonder. The phrase 'this way and that' has all the force of balanced antithesis. 'Better' running on swiftly from the line before halts this line on its reversed stress and so emphasizes the quality of the deciding. 'There' abruptly beginning the line, almost points to

a position among the reeds. The heavy syllable 'slow' following on immediately after the heavy syllable 'back', halts the line in sympathy with the meaning.

Though these metrical effects can be analysed by the reader, it by no means follows that in writing his verse the poet consciously contrived each one of them. Much must be ascribed to his poetic instinct, though some poets, Tennyson among them, seem to work more deliberately than others. For this reason Tennyson's poetry has been used here to illustrate these particular qualities of verse, though they are, of course, to be found in the other poems in this selection, and indeed in poetry generally.

Matthew Arnold's poem, *Sohrab and Rustum*, which is printed here after Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*, is like it in taking its story from a traditional source, in his case, the work of the Persian poet, Ferdosi, as it came down to him in translation and story (*see note, p. 103*). Among Arnold's narrative poems, *Sohrab and Rustum* stands out as the one in which he best fulfils the ideal of narrative poetry which he sets out when discussing this subject in the Preface to *Poems: A New Edition, 1853*. He writes that as a poem 'draws its force from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys', it is important that the poet should choose a fitting subject, one telling of human actions that are deeply interesting to the generality of men. 'The poet, then, has in the first place to select an excellent action; and what actions are the most excellent? Those, certainly, which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time.' This quality of exciting general interest is

present in the early accounts of the tragic meeting of Sohrab with his mighty father Rustum, and Arnold uses to the full the romance, heroic bravery, the passions of hate and love which are all part of the original story. These he shapes magnificently to his own ends in a narrative of controlled and dignified beauty where all is amply planned and executed with unhurried perfection.

Short as the poem is in comparison with the epics of the ancient poets and of Milton, it is from these that he has taken his inspiration. Moreover, part of the attraction for Arnold of this story of Sohrab and Rustum was in the use it allowed him to make of dramatic irony after the manner of the Greek dramatist, Sophocles. Dramatic irony is present when the audience or reader knows the underlying truth of a situation of which the characters themselves are unaware. From the outset of this story, the reader alone knows that Sohrab and Rustum are son and father. In the tragic ignorance of these two and the onlooker's knowledge of the truth lies the dramatic irony of the situation. From the first moment when Sohrab and Rustum meet and are, to them, inexplicably attracted to each other, and throughout all the great central scene, the onlooker watches with a deep pity, for he knows that a tragic misunderstanding is driving them to a mortal combat which must end in the death of one and the deep remorse of the other.

Nowhere is Arnold's use of his classical models more finely illustrated than in his similes inspired by those of the first great European narrative poet, Homer. These are leisurely and of ample scope, as when he compares Sohrab young and straight and pleasing to behold, to a cyprus-tree.

For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd;
Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,
Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—
So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.

No English poet, Milton alone excepted, excels Arnold in his use of protracted simile. Like Milton, too, he knew the evocative and musical power of proper names which he uses freely, sometimes singly, sometimes in lists. The blank verse metre used in this poem has all the weight and dignity necessary for this sombre but romantic theme.

Very different from *Sohrab and Rustum* both in theme and language is the next poem in this book, Browning's *Saul*. In this poem both Browning's attitude to life and his way of expressing it in poetry are admirably illustrated. He has often been described as an optimist, but this cannot be taken to mean that he thought all was good in the world. As many of his poems show, he was very much aware both of the evil and the tragedy of life. Late in his life he wrote:

Sorrow did and joy did nowise—life well weighed—
preponderate.

Nevertheless, he was intensely alive to the joy and the interest that life may hold, and his poetry communicates this feeling to the reader. The vividness of his experiences, the great positive good things of life which he knew or had known, and above all the fascination of trying to understand the minds and motives of his fellow beings, are all strongly expressed in his poetry and give it vitality and power.

How good is man's life, the mere living! How fit to
employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!

In the unrest of the Victorian age, he stood firm in his beliefs. The winds of scepticism howled round him without affecting him except perhaps so far as to make him raise his voice in a shout of defiance that could be heard above them.

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure.

Here and always, he asserts his belief in the goodness of God and the immortality of the soul.

The story of Saul is used as a mould into which he pours his religious musings; and so cleverly is the fusion of old Hebrew story and modern speculation contrived, that the thoughts are even clothed in the very imagery and language of the Psalms, traditionally attributed to David himself. David is here the young shepherd boy, pictured as Michelangelo carved him in marble, the epitome of all youthful grace and sensitiveness, the Apollo of the Christian age. He tells how he visited King Saul in his intense depression of spirit and brought him back to a normal state of mind by playing to him and singing. In reality, the poem is a series of magnificent monologues in which Browning, through the mouth of David, interprets existence for us as he feels it, praising the goodness of both the physical and spiritual life which man shares with God and all his creatures. The beauty of the lyrical passages culminates in the last lines of the poem where David, leaving Saul's presence after prophesying the coming of Christ, in his splendid

exaltation, feels and sees everywhere about him the endless spiritual life of the world.

In spite of David's prominence in this poem, Saul, as the title implies, is its true hero. David typifies heavenly forces; Saul, heroic and grand in his lonely melancholy, is the erring mortal whom those forces have to save. The poet's sympathy with that bizarre and barbaric figure who never utters a word but only groans, is shown in the magnificent similes he has used to describe him, the dramatic suddenness of his movements and David's obvious awe, reverence, and love for him.

For this poem, Browning has used a five-foot line made up of anapaests or feet with two unstressed syllables succeeded by a stressed one. This is a long and packed line, but it can, because of its many unstressed syllables, be swift in movement, especially when, as here, accelerated by the arrangement into rhyming couplets. The lines often run on, the pauses are varied and the whole is broken up by dramatic dialogue. The following example illustrates the kind of variation of pattern that occurs in the poem.

I will?|—the mere a|toms despise | me! Why

am | I not loth

To look that, | even that | in the face | too?

Why is | it I dare

Think but light|ly of such | impuis|sance?

What stops | my despair?

This;—'tis not | what man Does | which

exalts | him, but what | man Would do!

The first line, with only fourteen syllables, has a first foot of two heavy syllables and reads 'I will?' with a pause after the emphatic 'I'. In the fourth foot of the second line the pause falls effectively after 'too', which bears the stress of the foot. Finally, in the last line, the first and the fifth feet show variation of stress on words where the meaning demands a maximum of emphasis. Because Browning's pattern is on the whole so regular, the variations when they do occur, are very telling, as in the above example.

The apparent complexity of the language and subject-matter of this poem yields up most of its difficulty after a few readings. Once the general plan of the poem is perceived and the relations of the parts to each other, the chief remaining difficulty is in understanding the meaning of certain lines here and there in the poem, and particularly in stanzas xvii-xviii. An analysis of the individual parts of the poem and an interpretation of the most difficult lines have been attempted in the notes.

The last poem in this volume, Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, chosen as showing in its first flowering that bright beauty which was produced by the Pre-Raphaelites, is nevertheless representative of only one side of its author's work. To many people Christina Rossetti will always be known first for her fine religious poetry, some of the simplest and most sincere in our language. To those who knew her, there was a religious beauty in her very face and form. Holman Hunt gave the Christ in his famous picture, *The Light of the World*, the eyes and brow of Christina Rossetti, while her brother Dante Gabriel took her as the model for the Virgin Mary in his lovely pictures, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Nevertheless, while she

was still young particularly, her colourful fantastic work flourished side by side with her austere religious poetry; in fact in the volume of which *Goblin Market* is the title poem, there are lovely lyrics of a religious character. Later in her life, the religious poetry predominated.

In *Goblin Market* itself, however, the spirit of Pre-Raphaelite poetry and painting prevails. The colour and romantic charm of the poem are enhanced by the verse. Its technical skill is great and particularly interesting now as anticipating in metre, treatment of subject and use of metaphor and simile, much modern poetry. The verse with its frequent but irregular rhymes, its lines unequal in length and irregular in tempo, and its varied stress patterns, is a very flexible and effective instrument, and suits the fanciful theme.

Her use of simile is very striking and unusual. As a rule, by means of simile, a certain thing, often a very familiar thing to which one normally has no strong reaction, is compared or associated so effectively with another that we see it again in a new light vividly and as if for the first time. Hidden qualities, unexpected similarities, shine out under the stimulus of the simile. But Christina Rossetti's use of the simile is somewhat different. Below is a characteristic example, a description of Lizzie as she stands quiet and resolute while the angry goblins attack her from all sides.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-veined stone
Lashed by tides obstreperously,—
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea
Sending up a golden fire,—

Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree
White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
Like a royal virgin town
Topped with gilded dome and spire
Close beleagured by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down.

The very first line paints a picture of a girl beautiful in the manner of one of the Pre-Raphaelite maidens of Christina's brother, Dante Gabriel. The second line completes the simile—she stands there, a beautiful creature, sorely threatened by strong and destructive forces, like a water-lily in the midst of swirling waters. The comparisons which follow form a series of pictures, each effective in itself, but apparently only loosely associated with the first picture. Yet from this gradual piling up of lovely impressions, the first picture is in the end enriched by association with these other fair and valuable things all alike exposed to strong, destructive forces.

By a similar device of simple accumulation of individual items, notable pictorial effects are obtained. One of the most considerable examples of this is the list of fruits in the first few lines of the poem. Effective, too, is the use for scenes of lively action of many words rushing, headlong and exuberant, one after another, as in the description of the goblins.

Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing.

Again they appear:

Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chattering like magpies,
Fluttering like fishes.

Finally, when they disappear at last,

Some writhed into the ground,
Some dived into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanished in the distance.

It is difficult from the poem to decide on the nature and appearance of these goblins. In his two black and white illustrations for the first edition, Dante Gabriel Rossetti gave the goblins animal forms with human hands. Christina herself drew some water-colour illustrations on a copy of the poem. Her brother William, in his notes to the edition of her works published by Macmillan in 1904, described her pictures of the goblins thus: 'All very slim, agile figures in a close-fitting garb of blue; their faces, hands, and feet are sometimes brute-like, but of a scarcely definable type. The only exception is the "parrot-voiced" goblin who cried "Pretty goblin." He is a true parrot (such as Christina could draw one).' They seem to have been composite creatures, neither human nor animal but grotesque and eerie. Some of the queerer creatures to which they are likened, as for instance the wombat, we know Christina had seen at the Zoo and been interested in. Indeed, all her life she liked animals, especially if they were in any way quaint or unusual.

Throughout the poem she takes pleasure in observing

minutely the quality, texture, and colour of things. She writes of 'plump, unpecked cherries', 'bloom-down-cheeked peaches', 'bright-fire-like barberries', 'hungry thirsty rooks', 'purple and rich golden flags', 'morning winds so brisk to pass', 'apples, russet and dun', 'peaches with a velvet nap'.

In contrast to the bright clarity of these images, the nature and source of the baneful power of the goblin fruit are never wholly expressed. It is a mysterious evil engendered of the night, and can destroy 'the mere bright day's delight', and all that is good and wholesome. The golden curl from Laura's head which she exchanges for the fruit is meant to be a pledge; her life is forfeit, for no second gift of fruit was ever given to the same person. But even goblin evil gives way before the love and ingenuity of a sister. Yet neither the sense of evil nor the love and purity which defeat it are strongly enough realized in the poem to be the centre of interest. Christina's brother William, in his edition of his sister's poems, adds the following note to *Goblin Market*: 'I have more than once heard Christina say that she did not mean anything profound by the fairy-tale—it is not a moral apologue carried out in detail. Still the incidents are such as to be at any rate suggestive, and different minds may be likely to read different messages into them.' But for many readers, as for the poet herself, this story of the adventures of the two lovely sisters and of

The haunted glen
The wicked, quaint fruit merchant men

will have the charm of a fairy-tale. True, it is an unusually elaborate fairy-tale with its fantasy, its wealth of

glowing detail, and the intricacy and lilt of its verse, but one instinct with the authentic qualities of a dream world or, as the poet herself expressed it, of

Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time.

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

MORTE D'ARTHUR

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land. 10
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls 20
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more—but let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.

Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake 30
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king:
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus, 40
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock, 50
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,

This way and that dividing the swift mind, 60
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds, 70
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing 80
I bad thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud,
'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth, 90
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?'

What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? but were this kept, 100
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit, 110
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.
Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me! 120
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,

Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence: 130
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock 140
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath: .
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere: 150
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him 160
'Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere 170
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick,
quick!

I fear it is too late, and I shall die.' 180
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him, like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels— 190

And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them
rose

A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice an agony 200
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge,'
And to the barge they came. There those three
Queens

Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud, 210
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King; 221

Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance, 230
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new, 240
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by
prayer

Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats 250
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, 260
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere 270
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

AN EPISODE

AND the first grey of morning fill'd the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.
But all the Tartar camp along the stream
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in sleep:
Sohrab alone, he slept not: all night long
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed;
But when the grey dawn stole into his tent,
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,
And took his horseman's cloak, and left his tent,
And went abroad into the cold wet fog, 10
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.

Through the black Tartar tents he pass'd, which
stood

Clustering like bee-hives on the low flat strand
Of Oxus, where the summer-floods o'erflow
When the sun melts the snows in high Pamere:
Through the black tents he pass'd, o'er that low
strand,

And to a hillock came, a little back
From the stream's brink, the spot where first a boat,
Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.
The men of former times had crown'd the top 20
With a clay fort: but that was fall'n; and now
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.

And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood
Upon the thick-pil'd carpets in the tent,
And found the old man sleeping on his bed
Of rugs and felts, and near him lay his arms.
And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step
Was dull'd; for he slept light, an old man's sleep;
And he rose quickly on one arm, and said:—

30

'Who art thou? for it is not yet clear dawn.
Speak! is there news, or any night alarm?'

But Sohrab came to the bedside, and said:—

'Thou know'st me, Peran-Wisa: it is I.

The sun is not yet risen, and the foe
Sleep; but I sleep not; all night long I lie
Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.

For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek
Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,

In Samarcand, before the army march'd;
And I will tell thee what my heart desires.

40

Thou know'st if, since from Ader-baijan first
I came among the Tartars, and bore arms,
I have still served Afrasiab well, and shown,
At my boy's years, the courage of a man.

This too thou know'st, that while I still bear on
The conquering Tartar ensigns through the world,
And beat the Persians back on every field,
I seek one man, one man, and one alone—

Rustum, my father; who, I hoped, should greet,
Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field
His not unworthy, not inglorious son.

50

So I long hop'd, but him I never find.

Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.

Let the two armies rest to-day: but I

Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords

To meet me, man to man: if I prevail,
Rustum will surely hear it; if I fall—
Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.
Dim is the rumour of a common fight, 60
Where host meets host, and many names are sunk:
But of a single combat fame speaks clear.'

He spoke: and Peran-Wisa took the hand
Of the young man in his, and sigh'd, and said:—

'O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine!
Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,
And share the battle's common chance with us
Who love thee, but must press for ever first,
In single fight incurring single risk,
To find a father thou hast never seen? 70

That were far best, my son, to stay with us
Unmurmuring; in our tents, while it is war,
And when 'tis truce, then in Afrasiab's towns.
But, if this one desire indeed rules all,
To seek out Rustum—seek him not through fight:
Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,
O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son!
But far hence seek him, for he is not here.

For now it is not as when I was young,
When Rustum was in front of every fray: 80
But now he keeps apart, and sits at home,
In Seistan, with Zal, his father old.

Whether that his own mighty strength at last
Feels the abhorr'd approaches of old age,
Or in some quarrel with the Persian King.
There go!—Thou wilt not? Yet my heart forebodes
Danger or death awaits thee on this field.
Fain would I know thee safe and well, though lost
To us: fain therefore send thee hence, in peace

To seek thy father, not seek single fights 90
In vain:—but who can keep the lion's cub
From ravening? and who govern Rustum's son?
Go: I will grant thee what thy heart desires.'

So said he, and dropp'd Sohrab's hand, and left
His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay,
And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat
He pass'd, and tied his sandals on his feet,
And threw a white cloak round him, and he took
In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword;
And on his head he plac'd his sheep-skin cap, 100
Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul;
And raised the curtain of his tent, and call'd
His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun, by this, had risen, and clear'd the fog
From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands:
And from their tents the Tartar horsemen fil'd
Into the open plain; so Haman bade;
Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa rul'd
The host, and still was in his lusty prime.
From their black tents, long files of horse, they
stream'd; 110

As when, some grey November morn, the files,
In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes
Stream over Casbin, and the southern slopes
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,
Or some froze Caspian reed-bed, southward bound
For the warm Persian sea-board: so they stream'd.
The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,
First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears;
Large men, large steeds; who from Bokhara come
And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares. 120
Next, the more temperate Toorkmuns of the south,

The Tukas, and the lances of Salore,
And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands;
Light men, and on light steeds, who only drink
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.
And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came
From far, and a more doubtful service own'd;
The Tartars of Ferghana, from the banks
Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards
And close-set skull-caps; and those wilder hordes 130
Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,
Kalmucks and unkempt Kuzzaks, tribes who stray
Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,
Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere.
These all fil'd out from camp into the plain.
And on the other side the Persians form'd:—
First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd,
The Ilyats of Khorassan: and behind,
The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,
Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel. 140
But Peran-Wisa with his herald came,
Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,
And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.
And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw
That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back,
He took his spear, and to the front he came,
And check'd his ranks, and fix'd them where they
stood.
And the old Tartar came upon the sand
Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said:—
'Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear! 150
Let there be truce between the hosts to-day.
But choose a champion from the Persian lords
To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man.'

As, in the country, on a morn in June,
When the dew glistens on the pearled ears,
A shiver runs through the deep corn for joy—
So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,
A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they lov'd.

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool, 160
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow;
Winding so high, that, as they mount, they pass
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,
Chok'd by the air, and scarce can they themselves
Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries—
In single file they move, and stop their breath,
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging snows—
So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

And to Ferood his brother chiefs came up 170
To counsel: Gudurz and Zoarrah came,
And Feraburz, who ruled the Persian host
Second, and was the uncle of the King:
These came and counsell'd; and then Gudurz said:—
'Ferood, shame bids us take their challenge up,
Yet champion have we none to match this youth.
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.
But Rustum came last night; aloof he sits
And sullen, and has pitch'd his tents apart:
Him will I seek, and carry to his ear 180
The Tartar challenge, and this young man's name.
Haply he will forget his wrath, and fight.
Stand forth the while, and take their challenge up.'

So spake he; and Ferood stood forth and said:—
'Old man, be it agreed as thou hast said.
Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man.'

He spoke: and Peran-Wisa turn'd, and strode
Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.
But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,
And cross'd the camp which lay behind, and reach'd, 190
Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum's tents.
Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,
Just pitch'd: the high pavilion in the midst
Was Rustum's, and his men lay camp'd around.
And Gudurz enter'd Rustum's tent, and found
Rustum: his morning meal was done, but still
The table stood before him, charged with food—
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,
And dark green melons; and there Rustum sate
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist, 200
And play'd with it; but Gudurz came and stood
Before him; and he look'd, and saw him stand:
And with a cry sprang up, and dropp'd the bird,
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said:—
'Welcome! these eyes could see no better sight.
What news? but sit down first, and eat and drink.'
But Gudurz stood in the tent-door, and said:—
'Not now! a time will come to eat and drink,
But not to-day: to-day has other needs.
The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze: 210
For from the Tartars is a challenge brought
To pick a champion from the Persian lords
To fight their champion—and thou know'st his name—
Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.
O Rustum, like thy might is this young man's!
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.
And he is young, and Iran's chiefs are old,
Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose.'

He spoke; but Rustum answer'd with a smile:— 220
'Go to! if Iran's chiefs are old, then I
Am older: if the young are weak, the King
Errs strangely; for the King, for Kai Khosroo,
Himself is young, and honours younger men,
And lets the aged moulder to their graves.
Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young—
The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.
For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame?
For would that I myself had such a son,
And not that one slight helpless girl I have, 230
A son so fam'd, so brave, to send to war,
And I to tarry with the snow-hair'd Zal,
My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,
And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,
And he has none to guard his weak old age.
There would I go, and hang my armour up,
And with my great name fence that weak old man,
And spend the goodly treasures I have got,
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,
And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings, 240
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword no
more.'

He spoke, and smil'd, and Gudurz made reply:—
'What then, O Rustum, will men say to this,
When Sohrab dares our bravest forth, and seeks
Thee most of all, and thou, whom most he seeks,
Hidest thy face? Take heed lest men should say:
*Like some old miser, Rustum hoards his fame,
And shuns to peril it with younger men.'*

And, greatly mov'd, then Rustum made reply:—
'O Gudurz, wherefore dost thou say such words?
Thou knowest better words than this to say. 250

What is one more, one less, obscure or fam'd,
Valiant or craven, young or old, to me?
Are not they mortal, am not I myself?
But who for men of nought would do great deeds?
Come, thou shalt see how Rustum hoards his fame.
But I will fight unknown, and in plain arms;
Let not men say of Rustum, he was match'd
In single fight with any mortal man.'

He spoke, and frown'd; and Gudurz turn'd, and
ran

260

Back quickly through the camp in fear and joy,
Fear at his wrath, but joy that Rustum came.
But Rustum strode to his tent-door, and call'd
His followers in, and bade them bring his arms,
And clad himself in steel: the arms he chose
Were plain, and on his shield was no device,
Only his helm was rich, inlaid with gold,
And, from the fluted spine atop, a plume
Of horsehair wav'd, a scarlet horsehair plume.
So arm'd, he issued forth; and Ruksh, his horse, 270
Follow'd him like a faithful hound at heel,
Ruksh, whose renown was nois'd through all the earth,
The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once
Did in Bokhara by the river find
A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home,
And rear'd him; a bright bay, with lofty crest,
Dight with a saddle-cloth of broider'd green
Crusted with gold, and on the ground were work'd
All beasts of chase, all beasts which hunters know.
So follow'd, Rustum left his tents, and cross'd 280
The camp, and to the Persian host appear'd.
And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts
Hail'd; but the Tartars knew not who he was.

And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—
So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came. 290

And Rustum to the Persian front advanc'd,
And Sohrab arm'd in Haman's tent, and came.
And as afield the reapers cut a swathe
Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,
And on each side are squares of standing corn,
And in the midst a stubble, short and bare;
So on each side were squares of men, with spears
Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.
And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast
His eyes toward the Tartar tents, and saw 300
Sohrab come forth, and ey'd him as he came.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire—
At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
When the frost flowers the whiten'd window-panes—
And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustum eyed
The unknown adventurous youth, who from afar
Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth 310
All the most valiant chiefs: long he perus'd
His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.
For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd;
Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,
Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,

By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—
So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.
And a deep pity enter'd Rustum's soul
As he beheld him coming; and he stood, 320
And beckon'd to him with his hand, and said:—

'O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,
And warm, and pleasant; but the grave is cold!
Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.
Behold me: I am vast, and clad in iron,
And tried; and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe:
Never was that field lost, or that foe sav'd.
O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death?
Be govern'd: quit the Tartar host, and come 330
To Iran, and be as my son to me,
And fight beneath my banner till I die.
There are no youths in Iran brave as thou.'

So he spake, mildly: Sohrab heard his voice,
The mighty voice of Rustum; and he saw
His giant figure planted on the sand,
Sole, like some single tower, which a chief
Hath builded on the waste in former years
Against the robbers; and he saw that head,
Streak'd with its first grey hairs: hope filled his 340
soul;

And he ran forward and embrac'd his knees,
And clasp'd his hand within his own, and said:—

'O, by thy father's head! by thine own soul!
Art thou not Rustum? speak! art thou not he?'
But Rustum ey'd askance the kneeling youth,

And turn'd away, and spoke to his own soul:—
'Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean.

False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.

- For if I now confess this thing he asks,
And hide it not, but say: *Rustum is here:* 350
He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes,
But he will find some pretext not to fight,
And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,
A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.
And on a feast day, in Afrasiab's hall,
In Samarcand, he will arise and cry:—
“I challenged once, when the two armies camp'd
Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords
To cope with me in single fight; but they
Shrank, only Rustum dared: then he and I 360
Chang'd gifts, and went on equal terms away.
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud.
Then were the chiefs of Iran sham'd through me.’
And then he turn'd, and sternly spoke aloud:—
‘Rise! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus
Of Rustum? I am here, whom thou hast call'd
By challenge forth: make good thy vaunt, or yield.
Is it with Rustum only thou wouldst fight?
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee.
For well I know, that did great Rustum stand 370
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,
There would be then no talk of fighting more.
But being what I am, I tell thee this;
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul:
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt, and yield;
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer-floods,
Oxus in summer wash them all away.’
He spoke: and Sohrab answer'd, on his feet:—
‘Art thou so fierce? Thou wilt not fright me so. 380
I am no girl, to be made pale by words.

Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.
But Rustum is far hence, and we stand here.
Begin: thou art more vast, more dread than I,
And thou art proved, I know, and I am young—
But yet Success sways with the breath of Heaven.
And though thou thinkest that thou knowest sure
Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.
For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Pois'd on the top of a huge wave of Fate,
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
And whether it will heave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,
Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
We know not, and no search will make us know:
Only the event will teach us in its hour.'

390

He spoke, and Rustum answer'd not, but hurl'd
His spear: down from the shoulder, down it came,
As on some partridge in the corn a hawk
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds
Drops like a plummet: Sohrab saw it come,
And sprang aside, quick as a flash: the spear
Hiss'd, and went quivering down into the sand,
Which it sent flying wide:—then Sohrab threw
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield: sharp rang,
The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear.
And Rustum seiz'd his club, which none but he
Could wield: an unlopp'd trunk it was, and huge,
Still rough; like those which men in treeless plains
To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,
Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up
By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time
Hath made in Himalayan forests wrack,

400

410

And strewn the channels with torn boughs; so huge
The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck
One stroke; but again Sohrab sprang aside
Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came
Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's hand.
And Rustum follow'd his own blow, and fell 420
To his knees, and with his fingers clutch'd the sand:
And now might Sohrab have unsheathed his sword,
And pierc'd the mighty Rustum while he lay
Dizzy, and on his knees, and chok'd with sand;
But he look'd on, and smil'd, nor bar'd his sword,
But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said:—

 'Thou strik'st too hard: that club of thine will float
Upon the summer-floods, and not my bones.
But rise, and be not wroth; not wroth am I:
No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul. 430
Thou say'st, thou art not Rustum: be it so:
Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul?
Boy as I am, I have seen battles too;
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,
And heard their hollow roar of dying men;
But never was my heart thus touch'd before.
Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the heart?
O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven!
Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,
And make a truce, and sit upon this sand, 440
And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,
And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum's deeds.
There are enough foes in the Persian host
Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang;
Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou
Mayst fight; fight them, when they confront thy spear.
But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me!

He ceas'd: but while he spake, Rustum had risen,
And stood erect, trembling with rage: his club
He left to lie, but had regain'd his spear, 450
Whose fiery point now in his mail'd right-hand
Blazed bright and baleful, like that autumn Star,
The baleful sign of fevers: dust had soil'd
His stately crest, and dimm'd his glittering arms.
His breast heav'd; his lips foam'd; and twice his voice
Was chok'd with rage: at last these words broke
way:—

'Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!
Fight; let me hear thy hateful voice no more!
Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now 460
With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance;
But on the Oxus sands, and in the dance
Of battle, and with me, who make no play
Of war: I fight it out, and hand to hand.
Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine!
Remember all thy valour: try thy feints
And cunning: all the pity I had is gone:
Because thou hast sham'd me before both the hosts
With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles.'

He spoke; and Sohrab kindled at his taunts, 470
And he too drew his sword: at once they rush'd
Together, as two eagles on one prey
Come rushing down together from the clouds,
One from the east, one from the west: their shields
Dash'd with a clang together, and a din
Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters
Make often in the forest's heart at morn,
Of hewing axes, crashing trees: such blows
Rustum and Sohrab on each other hail'd.

And you would say that sun and stars took part 480
In that unnatural conflict; for a cloud
Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark'd the sun
Over the fighters' heads; and a wind rose
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp'd the pair.
In gloom they twain were wrapp'd, and they alone;
For both the on-looking hosts on either hand
Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,
And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.
But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot eyes 490
And labouring breath; first Rustum struck the shield
Which Sohrab held stiff out: the steel-spiked spear
Rent the tough plates, but fail'd to reach the skin,
And Rustum pluck'd it back with angry groan.
Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's helm,
Nor clove its steel quite through; but all the crest
He shore away, and that proud horsehair plume,
Never till now defil'd, sunk to the dust;
And Rustum bow'd his head; but then the gloom
Grew blacker: thunder rumbled in the air, 500
And lightnings rent the cloud; and Ruksh, the horse,
Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry:—
No horse's cry was that, most like the roar
Of some pain'd desert-lion, who all day
Hath trail'd the hunter's javelin in his side,
And comes at night to die upon the sand.
The two hosts heard that cry, and quaked for fear,
And Oxus curdled as it cross'd his stream.
But Sohrab heard, and quail'd not, but rush'd on,
And struck again; and again Rustum bow'd 510
His head; but this time all the blade, like glass,
Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,

And in his hand the hilt remain'd alone.
Then Rustum raised his head: his dreadful eyes
Glar'd, and he shook on high his menacing spear,
And shouted, *Rustum!* Sohrab heard that shout,
And shrank amaz'd: back he recoil'd one step,
And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing Form:
And then he stood bewilder'd; and he dropp'd
His covering shield, and the spear pierc'd his side. 520
He reel'd, and staggering back, sank to the ground.
And then the gloom dispers'd, and the wind fell,
And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all
The cloud; and the two armies saw the pair;
Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet,
And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began:—
'Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill
A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,
And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab's tent. 530
Or else that the great Rustum would come down
Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move
His heart to take a gift, and let thee go.
And then that all the Tartar host would praise
Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame,
To glad thy father in his weak old age.
Fool! thou art slain, and by an unknown man!
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old.'

And with a fearless mien Sohrab replied:— 540
'Unknown thou art; yet thy fierce vaunt is vain.
Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man!
No! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.
For were I match'd with ten such men as thou,
And I were he who till to-day I was,

They should be lying here, I standing there.
But that beloved name unnerv'd my arm—
That name, and something, I confess, in thee,
Which troubles all my heart, and made my shield
Fall; and thy spear transfix'd an unarm'd foe. 550
And now thou boastest, and insult'st my fate.
But hear thou this, fierce Man, tremble to hear!
The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death!
My father, whom I seek through all the world,
He shall avenge my death, and punish thee!

As when some hunter in the spring hath found
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill lake,
And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,
And follow'd her to find her where she fell 560
Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back
From hunting, and a great way off describes
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks
His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
A heap of fluttering feathers: never more
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it; 570
Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by:—
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But with a cold, incredulous voice, he said:—
'What prate is this of fathers and revenge?
The mighty Rustum never had a son.'

And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied:—
'Ah yes, he had! and that lost son am I. 580
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,
Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,
Somewhere, I know not where, but far from here;
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee.
Fierce Man, bethink thee, for an only son!
What will that grief, what will that vengeance be!
Oh, could I live, till I that grief had seen!
Yet him I pity not so much, but her,
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells 590
With that old King, her father, who grows grey
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.
Her most I pity, who no more will see
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,
With spoils and honour, when the war is done.
But a dark rumour will be bruited up,
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear;
And then will that defenceless woman learn
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more;
But that in battle with a nameless foe, 600
By the far distant Oxus, he is slain.'

He spoke; and as he ceased, he wept aloud,
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.
He spoke; but Rustum listen'd plung'd in thought.
Nor did he yet believe it was his son
Who spoke, although he call'd back names he knew;
For he had had sure tidings that the babe,
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all:
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear 610
Rustum should seek the boy, to train in arms;

And so he deem'd that either Sohrab took,
By a false boast, the style of Rustum's son;
Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.
So deem'd he; yet he listen'd, plunged in thought;
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore
At the full moon: tears gather'd in his eyes;
For he remember'd his own early youth,
And all its bounding rapture; as, at dawn, 620
The shepherd from his mountain lodge descries
A far bright City, smitten by the sun,
Through many rolling clouds:—so Rustum saw
His youth; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom;
And that old King, her father, who lov'd well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills 630
In Ader-baijan. And he saw that Youth,
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
Like some rich hyacinth, which by the scythe
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass:—so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.
And Rustum gaz'd on him with grief, and said:— 640
'O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have lov'd.
Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men
Have told thee false:—thou art not Rustum's son.

For Rustum had no son: one child he had—
But one—a girl: who with her mother now
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us—
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.'

But Sohrab answer'd him in wrath; for now
The anguish of the deep-fix'd spear grew fierce, 650
And he desired to draw forth the steel,
And let the blood flow free, and so to die;
But first he would convince his stubborn foe;
And, rising sternly on one arm, he said:—

'Man, who art thou who dost deny my words?
Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,
And Falsehood, while I liv'd, was far from mine.
I tell thee, prick'd upon this arm I bear
That seal which Rustum to my mother gave,
That she might prick it on the babe she bore.' 660

He spoke: and all the blood left Rustum's
cheeks;
And his knees totter'd, and he smote his hand,
Against his breast, his heavy mailed hand,
That the hard iron corslet clank'd aloud:
And to his heart he press'd the other hand,
And in a hollow voice he spake, and said:—

'Sohrab, that were a proof which could not lie.
If thou show this, then art thou Rustum's son.'

Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loos'd
His belt, and near the shoulder bar'd his arm, 670
And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
Prick'd: as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
An emperor's gift—at early morn he paints,
And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands—

So delicately prick'd the sign appear'd
On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.
It was that Griffin, which of old rear'd Zal,
Rustum's great father, whom they left to die, 680
A helpless babe, among the mountain-rocks.
Him that kind creature found, and rear'd, and
loved—

Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.
And Sohrab bared that image on his arm,
And himself scann'd it long with mournful eyes,
And then he touch'd it with his hand and said:—

'How say'st thou? Is that sign the proper sign
Of Rustum's son, or of some other man's?'

He spoke; but Rustum gaz'd, and gaz'd, and stood
Speechless; and then he utter'd one sharp cry: 690

O boy—thy Father!—and his voice chok'd there.
And then a dark cloud pass'd before his eyes,
And his head swam, and he sank down to earth.
But Sohrab crawl'd to where he lay, and cast
His arms about his neck, and kiss'd his lips,
And with fond faltering fingers strok'd his cheeks,
Trying to call him back to life: and life

Came back to Rustum, and he op'd his eyes,
And they stood wide with horror; and he seiz'd
In both his hands the dust which lay around, 700
And threw it on his head, and smirch'd his hair,
His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms:
And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,
And his sobs chok'd him; and he clutch'd his
sword,

To draw it, and for ever let life out.

But Sohrab saw his thought, and held his hands,
And with a soothing voice he spoke, and said:—

'Father, forbear: for I but meet to-day
The doom which at my birth was written down
In Heaven, and thou art Heaven's unconscious hand. 710
Surely my heart cried out that it was thou,
When first I saw thee; and thy heart spoke too,
I know it: but Fate trod those promptings down
Under its iron heel; Fate, Fate engag'd
The strife, and hurl'd me on my father's spear.
But let us speak no more of this: I find
My father; let me feel that I have found.
Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take
My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,
And wash them with thy tears, and say, "*My son!*" 720
Quick! quick! for number'd are my sands of life,
And swift; for like the lightning to this field
I came, and like the wind I go away—
Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.
But it was writ in Heaven that this should be.'

So said he: and his voice releas'd the heart
Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth; he cast
His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,
And kiss'd him. And awe fell on both the hosts
When they saw Rustum's grief: and Ruksh, the horse, 730
With his head bowing to the ground, and mane
Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe
First to the one then to the other mov'd
His head, as if inquiring what their grief
Might mean; and from his dark, compassionate eyes,
The big warm tears roll'd down, and caked the sand.
But Rustum chid him with stern voice, and said:—

'Ruksh, now thou grieve'st; but, O Ruksh, thy feet
Should then have rotted on their nimble joints,
When first they bore thy master to this field.' 740

But Sohrab look'd upon the horse and said:—
'Is this, then, Ruksh? How often, in past days,
My mother told me of thee, thou brave Steed!
My terrible father's terrible horse; and said,
That I should one day find thy lord and thee.
Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane.
O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I;
For thou hast gone where I shall never go,
And snuff'd the breezes of my father's home.
And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan, 750
And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake
Of Zirrah; and the aged Zal himself
Has often strok'd thy neck, and given thee food,
Corn in a golden platter soak'd with wine,
And said—"O Ruksh! bear Rustum well!"—but I
Have never known my grandsire's furrow'd face,
Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,
Nor slak'd my thirst at the clear Helmund stream:
But lodg'd among my father's foes, and seen
Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand, 760
Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,
And the black Toorkmun tents; and only drunk
The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,
Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,
The northern Sir; and this great Oxus stream,
The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die.'

And, with a heavy groan, Rustum replied:—
'Oh, that its waves were flowing over me!
Oh, that I saw its grains of yellow silt
Roll tumbling in the current o'er my head!'

770

And, with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied:—
'Desire not that, my father; thou must live.
For some are born to do great deeds, and live,

As some are born to be obscur'd, and die.
Do thou the deeds I die too young to do,
And reap a second glory in thine age.
Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.
But come: thou seest this great host of men
Which follow me; I pray thee, slay not these:
Let me entreat for them: what have they done? 780
They follow'd me, my hope, my fame, my star.
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
But me thou must bear hence, not send with
them,

But carry me with thee to Seistan,
And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,
Thou, and the snow-hair'd Zal, and all thy friends.
And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above my bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all:
That so the passing horseman on the waste 790
May see my tomb a great way off, and say—
*"Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies there,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill"*—
And I be not forgotten in my grave.'

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied:—
'Fear not; as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,
So shall it be: for I will burn my tents,
And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,
And carry thee away to Seistan,
And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee, 800
With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.
And I will lay thee in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above thy bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all,
And men shall not forget thee in thy grave.

And I will spare thy host: yea, let them go:
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
What should I do with slaying any more?
For would that all whom I have ever slain
Might be once more alive; my bitterest foes, 810
And they who were call'd champions in their
time,

And through whose death I won that fame I have:
And I were nothing but a common man,
A poor, mean soldier, and without renown;
So thou mightest live too, my Son, my Son!
Or rather would that I, even I myself,
Might now be lying on this bloody sand,
Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,
Not thou of mine; and I might die, not thou;
And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan; 820
And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine;
And say: "*O son, I weep thee not too sore,
For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end.*"
But now in blood and battles was my youth,
And full of blood and battles is my age;
And I shall never end this life of blood.'

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied:—
'A life of blood indeed, thou dreadful Man!
But thou shalt yet have peace; only not now;
Not yet: but thou shalt have it on that day, 830
When thou shalt sail in a high-masted Ship,
Thou and the other peers of Kai Khosroo,
Returning home over the salt blue sea,
From laying thy dear Master in his grave.'

And Rustum gaz'd on Sohrab's face, and said:—
'Soon be that day, my son, and deep that sea!
Till then, if Fate so wills, let me endure.'

He spoke; and Sohrab smil'd on him, and took
The spear, and drew it from his side, and eas'd
His wound's imperious anguish: but the blood 840
Came welling from the open gash, and life
Flow'd with the stream: all down his cold white
side

The crimson torrent ran, dim now, and soil'd,
Like the soil'd tissue of white violets
Left, freshly gather'd, on their native bank,
By romping children, whom their nurses call
From the hot fields at noon: his head droop'd low,
His limbs grew slack; motionless, white, he lay—
White, with eyes clos'd; only when heavy gasps,
Deep, heavy gasps, quivering through all his
frame, 850

Convuls'd him back to life, he open'd them,
And fix'd them feebly on his father's face:
Till now all strength was ebb'd, and from his limbs
Unwillingly the spirit fled away,
Regretting the warm mansion which it left,
And youth, and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead:
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd 860
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now, 'mid their broken flights of steps,
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.

And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darken'd all; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,

As of a great assembly loos'd, and fires
Began to twinkle through the fog: for now 870
Both armies mov'd to camp, and took their meal;
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward; the Tartars by the river marge:
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic River floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there mov'd,
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasman waste,
Under the solitary moon: he flow'd
Right for the Polar Star, past Orgunjè, 880
Brimming and bright and large: then sands begin
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer—till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright 890
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bath'd stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

ROBERT BROWNING

SAUL

I

SAID Abner, 'At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere
thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!' Then I wished it, and
did kiss his cheek.
And he, 'Since the King, O my friend, for thy coun-
tenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from
his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King
liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water
be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of
three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer
nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their
strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks
back upon life.

10

II

'Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child
with his dew

On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living
 and blue
 Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no
 wild heat
 Were now raging to torture the desert!

III

Then I, as was meet,
 Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on
 my feet,
 And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent
 was unlooped;
 I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I
 stooped;
 Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all
 withered and gone,
 That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my
 way on
 Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once
 more I prayed, 20
 And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not
 afraid
 But spoke, 'Here is David, thy servant!' And no
 voice replied.
 At the first I saw nought but the blackness; but soon
 I descried
 A something more black than the blackness—the
 vast, the upright
 Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into
 sight
 Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
 Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof,
 showed Saul.

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms
stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to
each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught
in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily ³⁰
hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance
come
With the spring-time—so agonized Saul, drear and
stark, blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine
round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noon-tide—
those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as,
one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be
done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they
have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the
stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and ⁴⁰
so far!

VI

—Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland
will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the cricket
elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then,
what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand
house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird
and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love
and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family
here.

VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their
wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship,
and great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—And⁵⁰
then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey—'Bear,
bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are
balm-seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left such as he
on the bier.
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!—And
then, the glad chaunt

Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next,
 she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And then,
 the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress
 an arch
Nought can break; who shall harm them, our friends?
 —Then, the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned. 60
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul
 groaned.

VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and
 listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and
 sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with
 a start,
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous
 at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung
 there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it
 unchecked,
As I sang,—

IX

 'Oh, our manhood's prime vigour!
— No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew
 unbraced.

Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up
to rock, 70
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the
cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of
the bear;
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his
lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold
dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full
draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bul-
rushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and
well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to
employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose
sword thou didst guard 80
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for
glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up
as men sung
The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her
faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, "Let one
more attest,
I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and
all was for best?"
Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph,
not much, but the rest.

And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the
working whence grew
Such results as, from seething grape-bundles, the
spirit strained true:
And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of
wonder and hope,
Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the
eye's scope,—
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is
thine; 90
And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one
head combine!
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and
rage (like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and lets the
gold go)
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame
crowning them,—all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—
King Saul!

X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart, hand,
harp, and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding
rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as when,
dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains
through its array, 100
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—'Saul!' cried I,
and stopped,

And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul,
 who hung propped
By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck
 by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes
 right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that
 held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a
 broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,—leaves
 grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down
 to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your
 mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages
 untold—110
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each
 furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all
 hail, there they are!
—Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold
 the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the
 green on his crest
For their food in the ardours of summer. One long
 shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and
 was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, released
 and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse,
 'twixt hope and despair;

Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile
his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forth-
with to remand 120
To their place what new objects should enter: 'twas
Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was
hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch
from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's slow
decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap
and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so,
arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI

What spell or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next
should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him?—Song
filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it
yields 130
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond,
on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten
the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the
cup they put by?

He saith, 'It is good'; still he drinks not: he lets me
 praise life,
 Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII

Then fancies grew rife
 Which had come long ago on the pasture, when
 round me the sheep
 Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled slow as
 in sleep;
 And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that
 might lie
 'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the
 hill and the sky:
 And I laughed—'Since my days are ordained to be
 passed with my flocks, 140
 Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains
 and the rocks,
 Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image
 the show
 Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly
 shall know!
 Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the
 courage that gains,
 And the prudence that keeps what men strive for.'
 And now these old trains
 Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once
 more the string
 Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

XIII

'Yea, my King,'

I began—'thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts
that spring

From the mere mortal life held in common by man
and by brute:

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul
it bears fruit. 150

Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its
stem trembled first

Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then
safely outburst

The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when
these too, in turn

Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet
more was to learn,

E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit.
Our dates shall we slight,

When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care
for the plight

Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them?
Not so! stem and branch

Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the
palm-wine shall staunch

Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee
such wine.

Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be
thine! 160

By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still
shalt enjoy

More indeed, than at first when unconscious; the life
of a boy.

'Crush that life, and behold its wine running! 'Each
deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en
as the sun
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him,
though tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must
everywhere trace
The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray
of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over,
shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardour, till
they too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South
and the North 170
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse
in the past!
But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at
her height,
So with man—so his power and his beauty for ever
take flight.
No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look
forth o'er the years!
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin
with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his
tomb—bid arise
A grey mountain of marble heaped four-square, till,
built to the skies,
Let it mark where the great First King slumbers:
whose fame would ye know?

Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record
shall go 180
In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was
Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace
chid,—
For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there!
Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon
they shall spend
(See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise,
and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the
statesman's great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The
river's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when
prophet-winds rave:
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and
their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God
that thou art! 190

XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst
grant me that day,
And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to
essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield and
my sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word
was my word,—

Still be with me, who then at the summit of human
endeavour
And scaling the highest man's thought could, gazed
hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty
to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—God's
throne from man's grave!
Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice to
my heart
Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last
night I took part, 200
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with
my sheep,
And still fear lest the terrible glory vanish like sleep!
For I wake in the grey dewy covert, while Hebron
upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and
Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV

I say then,—my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever
more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him—he slowly
resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right-
hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted
the swathes
Of his turban, and see—the huge sweat that his
countenance bathes, 210

He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his
loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp
set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still,
though much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same,
God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never
quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop till, stayed by
the pile
Of his armour and war-cloak and garments, he leaned
there awhile,
And sat out my singing,—one arm round the tent-
prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack—till I
touched on the praise 220
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient
there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then
first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his
vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like
oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up
to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke
not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it
with care

Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow:
 thro' my hair
 The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my
 head, with kind power—
 All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a
 flower. 230
 Thus held he me there with his great eyes that
 scrutinized mine—
 And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where
 was the sign?
 I yearned—'Could I help thee, my father, inventing
 a bliss,
 I would add, to that life of the past, both the future
 and this;
 I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages
 hence,
 As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's
 heart to dispense!'

XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no
 song more! Outbroke—

XVII

'I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and
 I spoke:
 I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received
 in my brain
 And pronounced on the rest of his handwork—
 returned him again 240

His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I
saw:

I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet
all's law.

Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each
faculty tasked

To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dew-
drop was asked.

Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom
laid bare.

Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the
Infinite Care!

Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?

I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and
no less,

In the kind I imagined, full fronts me, and God is
seen God

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and
the clod.

And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending up-
raises it too)

The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's
all-complete,

As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his
feet.

Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity
known,

I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of
my own.

There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hood-
wink,

I am fain to keep still in abeyance (I laugh as I think),

Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I
worst
E'en the Giver in one gift.—Behold, I could love if
I durst! 260
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may
o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for
love's sake.
—What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when
doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the
hundredth appal?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the
greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it?
Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end,
what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this
man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who
yet alone can? 270
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will,
much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous
dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such
a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering
the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears
attest)

These good things being given, to go on, and give
 one more, the best?
 Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at
 the height
 This perfection,—succeed with life's dayspring,
 death's minute of night?
 Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the
 mistake,
 Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid
 him awake 280
 From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find
 himself set
 Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new
 harmony yet
 To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?
 —or endure!
 The man taught enough, by life's dream, of the rest
 to make sure,
 By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified
 bliss,
 And the next world's reward and repose, by the
 struggles in this

XVIII

'I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who
 receive
 In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to
 believe
 All's one gift thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt
 to my prayer
 As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to
 the air 290

From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature,
 thy dread Sabaoth:
I will?—the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not
 loth
 To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it
 I dare
 Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops
 my despair?
 This;—'tis not what man Does which exalts him,
 but what man Would do!
 See the King—I would help him but cannot, the
 wishes fall through.
 Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor
 to enrich,
 To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—
 knowing which,
 I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through
 me now!
 Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou
 —so wilt thou 300
 So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, utter-
 most crown—
 And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor
 down
 One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no
 breath,
 Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue
 with death!
 As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
 Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being
 Beloved!
 He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall
 stand the most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh,
that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me, 310
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!

XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home in
the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and
to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the
aware:
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell
loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled
and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I
fainted not, 320
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported,
suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy
behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank
to rest.

Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from
 earth—
 Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender
 birth;
 In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of the
 hills;
 In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden
 wind-thrills;
 In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with
 eye sidling still
 Though averted with wonder and dread, in the birds
 stiff and chill
 That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid
 with awe: 330
 E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the
 new law.
 The same stared in the white humid faces upturned
 by the flowers;
 The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved
 the vine-bowers;
 And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent
 and low,
 With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—'E'en so,
 it is sol'

CHRISTINA GEORGINA ROSSETTI

GOBLIN MARKET

MORNING and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries, 10
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crap-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries;—
All ripe together
In summer weather,—
Morns that pass by,
Fair eves that fly;
Come buy, come buy:
Our grapes fresh from the vine, 20
Pomegranates full and fine,
Dates and sharp bullaces,
Rare pears and greengages,
Damsons and bilberries,
Taste them and try:

Currants and gooseberries,
Bright-fire-like barberries,
Figs to fill your mouth,
Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye; 30
Come buy, come buy.'
Evening by evening
Among the brookside rushes,
Laura bowed her head to hear,
Lizzie veiled her blushes:
Crouching close together
In the cooling weather,
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
'Lie close,' Laura said, 40
Pricking up her golden head:
'We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?'
'Come buy,' call the goblins
Hobbling down the glen.
'Oh,' cried Lizzie, 'Laura, Laura,
You should not peep at goblin men.'
Lizzie covered up her eyes, 50
Covered close lest they should look;
Laura reared her glossy head,
And whispered like the restless brook:
'Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men.

One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,

GOBLIN MARKET

81

One lugs a golden dish
 Of many pounds' weight.
 How fair the vine must grow 60
 Whose grapes are so luscious;
 How warm the wind must blow
 Through those fruit bushes.'
 'No,' said Lizzie: 'No, no, no;
 Their offers should not charm us,
 Their evil gifts would harm us.'
 She thrust a dimpled finger
 In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
 Curious Laura chose to linger
 Wondering at each merchant man. 70
 One had a cat's face,
 One whisked a tail,
 One tramped at a rat's pace,
 One crawled like a snail,
 One like a wombat prowled obtuse and
 furry,
 One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.
 She heard a voice like voice of doves
 Cooing all together:
 They sounded kind and full of loves
 In the pleasant weather. 80
 Laura stretched her gleaming neck
 Like a rush-imbedded swan,
 Like a lily from the beck,
 Like a moonlit poplar branch,
 Like a vessel at the launch
 When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen
 Turned and trooped the goblin men,

With their shrill repeated cry,
'Come buy, come buy.' 90
When they reached where Laura was
They stood stock still upon the moss,
Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother;
Signalling each other,
Brother with sly brother.
One set his basket down,
One reared his plate;
One began to weave a crown
Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown 100
(Men sell not such in any town);
One heaved the golden weight
Of dish and fruit to offer her:
'Come buy, come buy,' was still their cry.
Laura stared but did not stir,
Longed but had no money.
The whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste
In tones as smooth as honey,
The cat-faced purr'd,
The rat-faced spoke a word 110
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was
heard;
One parrot-voiced and jolly
Cried 'Pretty Goblin' still for 'Pretty Polly';
One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
'Good Folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either,

And all my gold is on the furze 120

That shakes in windy weather

Above the rusty heather.'

'You have much gold upon your head,'

They answered all together:

'Buy from us with a golden curl.'

She clipped a precious golden lock,

She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,

Then sucked their fruit globes fair or
red.

Sweeter than honey from the rock,

Stronger than man-rejoicing wine, 130

Clearer than water flowed that juice;

She never tasted such before,

How should it cloy with length of use?

She sucked and sucked and sucked the
more

Fruits which that unknown orchard
bore;

She sucked until her lips were sore;

Then flung the emptied rinds away

But gathered up one kernel stone,

And knew not was it night or day

As she turned home alone. 140

Lizzie met her at the gate

Full of wise upbraidings:

'Dear, you should not stay so late,

Twilight is not good for maidens;

Should not loiter in the glen

In the haunts of goblin men.

Do you not remember Jeanie,

How she met them in the moonlight,

Took their gifts both choice and many
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers 150
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the noonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and
 grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago 160
That never blow.
You should not loiter so.'
'Nay, hush,' said Laura:
'Nay, hush, my sister:
I ate and ate my fill,
Yet my mouth waters still:
To-morrow night I will
Buy more'; and kissed her.
'Have done with sorrow;
I'll bring you plums to-morrow 170
Fresh on their mother twigs,
Cherries worth getting;
You cannot think what figs
My teeth have met in,
What melons icy-cold
Piled on a dish of gold
Too huge for me to hold,
What peaches with a velvet nap,
Pellucid grapes without one seed:
Odorous indeed must be the mead 180

Whereon they grow, and pure the wave
they drink
With lilies at the brink,
And sugar-sweet their sap.'

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtained bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings.
Moon and stars gazed in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forebore to fly,
Not a bat flapped to and fro
Round their nest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest.

190

Early in the morning
When the first cock crowed his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
Aired and set to rights the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
Talked as modest maidens should:
Lizzie with an open heart,

200

210

Laura in an absent dream,
One content, one sick in part;
One warbling for the mere bright day's
delight,
One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:
They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;
Lizzie most placid in her look,
Laura most like a leaping flame.
They drew the gurgling water from its
deep.
Lizzie plucked purple and rich golden
flags, 220
Then turning homeward said: 'The sunset
flushes
Those furthest loftiest crags;
Come, Laura, not another maiden lags.
No wilful squirrel wags,
The beasts and birds are fast asleep.'
But Laura loitered still among the rushes,
And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still,
The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill;
Listening ever, but not catching 230
The customary cry,
'Come buy, come buy,'
With its iterated jingle
Of sugar-baited words:
Not for all her watching
Once discerning even one goblin
Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling—

Let alone the herds
That used to tramp along the glen,
In groups or single, 240
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, 'O Laura, come;
I hear the fruit-call, but I dare not look:
You should not loiter longer at this brook:
Come with me home.
The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
Each glow-worm winks her spark,
Let us get home before the night grows dark:
For clouds may gather
Though this is summer weather, 250
Put out the lights and drench us through;
Then if we lost our way what should we do?'

Laura turned cold as stone
To find her sister heard that cry alone,
That goblin cry,
'Come buy our fruits, come buy.'
Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?
Must she no more such succous pasture find,
Gone deaf and blind?
Her tree of life drooped from the root: 260
She said not one word in her heart's sore ache:
But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
So crept to bed, and lay
Silent till Lizzie slept;
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,

Brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear
To watch her sister's cankerous care, 300
Yet not to share.

She night and morning
Caught the goblin's cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:'—
Beside the brook, along the glen,
She heard the tramp of goblin men,
The voice and stir
Poor Laura could not hear;
Longed to buy fruit to comfort her, 310
But feared to pay too dear.
She thought of Jeanie in her grave,
Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died
In her gay prime,
In earliest winter time,
With the first glazing rime,
With the first snow-fall of crisp winter time.

Till Laura dwindling 320
Seemed knocking at Death's door.
Then Lizzie weighed no more
Better and worse;
But put a silver penny in her purse,
Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps
of furze

At twilight, halted by the brook:
And for the first time in her life
Began to listen and look.

Laughed every goblin
When they spied her peeping: 330
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces,
Demure grimaces,
Cat-like and rat-like, 340
Ratel- and wombat-like,
Snail-paced in a hurry,
Parrot-voiced and whistler,
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chattering like magpies,
Fluttering like pigeons,
Gliding like fishes,—
Hugged her and kissed her:
Squeezed and caressed her:
Stretched up their dishes, 350
Panniers, and plates:
'Look at our apples
Russet and dun,
Bob at our cherries,
Bite at our peaches,
Citrons and dates,
Grapes for the asking,

Pears red with basking
Out in the sun,
Plums on their twigs; 360
Pluck them and suck them,—
Pomegranates, figs.'

'Good folk,' said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
'Give me much and many:'
Held out her apron,
Tossed them her penny.
'Nay, take a seat with us,
Honour and eat with us,'
They answered grinning: 370
'Our feast is but beginning.
Night yet is early,
Warm and dew-pearly,
Wakeful and starry:
Such fruits as these
No man can carry;
Half their bloom would fly,
Half their dew would dry,
Half their flavour would pass by.
Sit down and feast with us, 380
Be welcome guest with us,
Cheer you and rest with us.'—
'Thank you,' said Lizzie: 'but one
waits

At home alone for me:
So without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and
many,

Give me back my silver penny
I tossed you for a fee.'—
They began to scratch their pates, 390
No longer wagging, purring,
But visibly demurring,
Grunting and snarling.
One called her proud,
Cross-grained, uncivil;
Their tones waxed loud,
Their looks were evil.
Lashing their tails
They trod and hustled her,
Elbowed and jostled her, 400
Clawed with their nails,
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,
Twisted her hair out by the roots,
Stamped upon her tender feet,
Held her hands and squeezed their fruits
Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-veined stone 410
Lashed by tides obstreperously,—
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea,
Sending up a golden fire,—
Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree
White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
Like a royal virgin town
Topped with gilded dome and spire

Close beleaguered by a fleet 420
Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,
Twenty cannot make him drink.
Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,
Coaxed and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
Kicked and knocked her,
Mauled and mocked her,
Lizzie uttered not a word; 430
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laughed in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syruiped all her face,
And lodged in dimples of her chin,
And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.
At last the evil people,
Worn out by her resistance,
Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit
Along whichever road they took, 440
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
Some writhed into the ground,
Some dived into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanished in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,
Lizzie went her way;
Knew not was it night or day;
Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze, 450

Threaded copse and dingle,
And heard her penny jingle
Bouncing in her purse,—
Its bounce was music to her ear.
She ran and ran
As if she feared some goblin man
Dogged her with gibe or curse
Or something worse:
But not one goblin skurried after,
Nor was she pricked by fear; 460
The kind heart made her windy-paced
That urged her home quite out of breath
with haste
And inward laughter.

She cried, 'Laura,' up the garden,
'Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew. 470
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men.'

Laura started from her chair,
Flung her arms up in the air,
Clutched her hair:
'Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
For my sake the fruit forbidden?
Must your light like mine be hidden, 480

Your young life like mine be wasted,
Undone in mine undoing,
And ruined in my ruin,
Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?'—
She clung about her sister,
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
Tears once again
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth; 490
Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,
That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
She loathed the feast:
Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,
Rent all her robe, and wrung
Her hands in lamentable haste,
And beat her breast.
Her locks streamed like the torch 500
Borne by a racer at full speed,
Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
Or like an eagle when she stems the light
Straight toward the sun,
Or like a caged thing freed,
Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked
at her heart,
Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name: 510

Ah fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense failed in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topped waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea, 520
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.
That night long Lizzie watched by her,
Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
Felt for her breath,
Held water to her lips, and cooled her face
With tears and fanning leaves.
But when the first birds chirped about their
eaves, 530
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laughed in the innocent old way,
Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of
grey, 540

Her breath was sweet as May,
And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years
Afterwards, when both were wives
With children of their own;
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
Their lives bound up in tender lives;
Laura would call the little ones
And tell them of her early prime,
Those pleasant days long gone 550
Of not-returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood
(Men sell not such in any town):
Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,
And win the fiery antidote:
Then joining hands to little hands 560
Would bid them cling together,—
'For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.'

NOTES

MORTE D'ARTHUR

The poem *Morte d'Arthur* is a fragment first published by Tennyson in the year 1842. The story is derived from an early cycle of legends which centre round the figure of King Arthur. Their origin is obscure, but the character of Arthur first took definite shape in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of the Benedictine monk Geoffrey, who lived in Monmouth in the twelfth century. Other writers, notably Layamon and Wace worked upon the Arthurian stories before they were finally collected and given their modern form by Sir Thomas Malory in his *Morte d'Arthur*, one of the first books to be printed in English by Caxton. From this Tennyson took the story of his *Morte d'Arthur*. Later he used a great deal more of Malory's material for his series of poems, *The Idylls of the King*, and there incorporated the fragment *Morte d'Arthur* in a longer poem called *The Passing of Arthur*.

King Arthur is supposed to have lived in Britain during the fifth or sixth century. Fabulous stories surround his birth and death. Tennyson, in *The Coming of Arthur*, tells how Arthur, the son of King Uther and of Ygerne, was born in the castle of Tintagel on the wild north Cornish coast. Because his father Uther had died before his birth and his mother feared for his life at the hands of the warring lords each striving for Uther's power, the baby prince was delivered over for safe keeping to Merlin the Magician. When he was still a boy, Merlin brought him forth from his seclusion and set him on his father's throne. Many doubted Arthur's right to his throne, saying he was no true son of Uther. But the mysterious Lady of the Lake and the three fair queens, the friends of Arthur, gave him power to inspire his knights with confidence and, in the interests of peace and justice, he united them in the famous Fellowship of the Round Table. Arthur fought always with his magnificent jewelled sword Excalibur, which had come to him mysteriously

from the heart of the lake, and which bore on one side the inscription, 'Take me', and on the other 'Cast me away'.

During the years of his kingship, Arthur achieved many wise and noble deeds and, for a time, having overcome the heathen lords in twelve great battles by the help of his Knights of the Round Table, he ruled a united and prosperous land. But discord and treachery crept in and centred round Modred, Arthur's nephew, who raised a revolt in the land. Arthur, with the knights who had remained loyal to him, drove back the rebel forces to the far western land of Lyonesse which, legend says, once lay beyond the point we now call Land's End:

'Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse—
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again.
There he took his stand,
On the waste sand by the waste sea,'

and in a great battle which lasted all day, the friends and foes of Arthur alike met their end. When the mist which had obscured the battlefield rolled away, Arthur saw that all the combatants were dead save his own knight Sir Bedivere and the traitor Sir Modred, whom he attacked and slew with one last stroke of Excalibur before sinking down himself mortally wounded. Nothing remained but to cast back the sword Excalibur into the lake, in accordance with the commands he had received, and await the issue. As soon as Excalibur had disappeared into the heart of the lake, a dusky barge bearing the three queens approached the shore. Arthur was lifted on board and the boat sailed away, bearing him to the lovely 'island valley of Avilion', the abode of the Blessed, whence, so legend has it, he will return again to help his country in its need.

The poem *Morte d'Arthur* printed here, recounts only the episode of the casting away of Excalibur and the passing of Arthur.

1. 3. **King Arthur's table:** the Knights of the Round Table, the fellowship of loyal knights which Arthur had gathered round him and so-called because when they met together for feasting or in council, they sat at a great round table which could seat a hundred and fifty knights. This table had come

to Arthur as a wedding gift from his bride's father. The first mention of it is in the Norman-French version of the Arthurian legends, *Geste de Breton* (1154) by Wace.

l. 4. *Lyonesse*: see introductory note.

l. 21. *Camelot*: the legendary city where King Arthur held his court.

'Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces and stately, rich in emblem and the work of ancient kings who did their days in stone.'

l. 22. *I perish . . . I made*: he died as a result of the civil strife and treachery in the very kingdom which he had built up.

l. 23. *Merlin*: a magician who aided Ygerne in preserving the life of Arthur as a baby, and by his counsel and magic arts later enabled him to ascend and keep the throne of his father. In Malory's story, it is Merlin who makes the wonderful Round Table and who prophesies that Arthur will return at the need of his people from beyond the bourne of death.

l. 27. *Excalibur*: the sword which, according to one version of the story, Arthur, as a boy, drew out of a stone when no one else could move it, or which, according to Tennyson's version, came to him from the lake. It is not unusual in legend for the hero to possess a sword with more than natural properties which he alone could wield and which, after his death, either passed as a great heirloom to some worthy successor or, as here, was lost to the world when its owner had no further need of it.

l. 31. *samite*: a lovely word suggesting to the modern ear some fairy material not woven on mortal loom. Actually Tennyson, with a fine sense of the right word, has taken this one from Mallory, who writes, 'In the myddes of the lake Arthur was ware of an arme clothed in whyte samyte.' This was a rich silk material gleaming with interwoven threads of gold and silver, and much worn in the Middle Ages.

l. 37. *middle mere*: middle of the mere, a Latinism.

l. 38. *lightly*: with light, quick foot.

l. 43. *hest*: behest.

l. 57. *jacinth-work*: inlaid with jacinths (the same word as hyacinths), which may be gems of a blue colour resembling the sapphire, or of a reddish-orange colour like the garnet.

- l. 60. **dividing the swift mind:** veering swiftly from one opinion to another.
- l. 75. **thy fealty:** the fidelity owed by Sir Bedivere to Arthur as his lord.
- l. 80. **lief:** dear, beloved. The use here of this archaic word gives balance to the line and serves to emphasize the 'dear'. With the help of other similar touches here and there, the poet seeks to convey the impression that the scene is set in the past, and the words are those of a man of a time far removed from our own.
- l. 86. **curiously:** carefully, with the utmost skill. This is the earlier meaning of the word.
- l. 100. **rumours of a doubt:** doubtful rumours, vague stories.
- l. 122. **laid widow'd:** bereft of.
- ll. 133-41. **then quickly . . . of the northern sea:** notice the tempo of the poem here, where from a slower moving line the poet changes into one swift and vigorous, to mark Sir Bedivere's sudden decision and breathless rush to rid himself at once of Excalibur, lest his purpose weaken.
- l. 139. **a streamer of the northern morn:** a bright ray of the Aurora Borealis or the Northern Lights.
- l. 140. **the moving isles of winter shock:** icebergs floating about like islands in northern seas loudly crash together.
- l. 181-92. **but the other swiftly . . . winter moon:** these are among the finest lines in our literature for a sustained effect of sound echoing sense. Particularly effective are the last two lines where the urgency and force of the preceding lines give place to a sense of achievement and repose expressed both by the sound and the meaning of the words:

'And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.'

- l. 197. **black-stoled:** wearing long simple black gowns or wraps.
- l. 209. **casque:** helmet.
- l. 215. **greaves and cuisses:** protective armour for the shins and thighs.
- l. 216. **drops of onset:** drops of blood shed during, or as a result of, onset or battle.
- l. 259. **Avillon:** or Avalon, a place, according to Celtic

mythology, situated in the midst of the Islands of the Blessed where men dwell after death in happiness among all the gentle beauties of nature. This legendary heaven of Tennyson's poem is reminiscent of the Elysian fields of classical poetry.

- l. 267. *fluting . . . ere her death*: these words refer to the old idea that the last and dying song of a swan had a melancholy, almost unearthly beauty surpassing far its normal note.
- l. 272. *and on the mere . . . away*: this last line 'drags its slow length along' to a quiet and solemn end beautifully fulfilling the closing mood of the poem.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

'The young Sohrab was the fruit of one of Rustum's early amours. He had left his mother, and sought fame under the banners of Afrasiab, whose armies he commanded, and soon obtained a renown beyond that of all contemporary heroes but his father. He had carried death and dismay into the ranks of the Persians, and had terrified the boldest warriors of that country, before Rustum encountered him, which at last that hero resolved to do, under a feigned name. They met thrée times. The first time they parted by mutual consent, though Sohrab had the advantage; the second, the youth obtained a victory, but granted life to his unknown father; the third was fatal to Sohrab, who, when writhing in the pangs of death, warned his conqueror to shun the vengeance that is inspired by parental woes, and bade him dread the rage of the mighty Rustum, who must soon learn that he had slain his son Sohrab. These words, we are told, were as death to the aged hero; and when he recovered from a trance, he called in despair for proofs of what Sohrab had said. The afflicted and dying youth tore open his mail, and showed his father a seal which his mother had placed on his arm when she discovered to him the secret of his birth, and bade him seek his father. The sight of his own signet rendered Rustum quite frantic; he cursed himself, attempted to put an end to his existence, and was only prevented by the efforts

of his expiring son. After Sohrab's death, he burnt his tents and all his goods, and carried the corpse to Seistan, where it was interred; the army of Turan was, agreeably to the last request of Sohrab, permitted to cross the Oxus unmolested. . . . To reconcile us to the improbability of this tale, we are informed that Rustum could have no idea his son was in existence. The mother of Sohrab had written to him her child was a daughter, fearing to lose her darling infant if she revealed the truth; and Rustum, as before stated, fought under a feigned name, an usage not uncommon in the chivalrous combats of those days.—Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia*, vol. i, ch. iii.

Matthew Arnold based his story of Sohrab and Rustum on the above extract from Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia*, supplemented by an account in French of the same story as originally told in the poem of the great Persian writer Ferdosi. Of this poem Arnold says that 'it embodies the tradition of a people'. Arnold also owes to Sir John Malcolm's book many of the incidental references to the history and customs of the Persians and Tartars. Malcolm, using Ferdosi's poem and other early material, devotes two chapters in his book to an account of the half-fabulous early history of Persia and especially to the deeds of her kings and warriors. Among these Rustum is the greatest. His deeds and personality have for the Persian much the same attraction as those of King Arthur have for us.

Rustum was descended on the maternal side from the great monarch Jemshid (*see note to l. 861*), Atrut's father. Atrut's mother was a princess of Seistan, and he himself ruled in Seistan and served the Persian kings faithfully. His great-grandson was Sam, the first famous member of the family, the chief warrior and counsellor of the king. Soon after the birth of his first son Zal, Sam was persuaded that the child was not his own and so caused him to be exposed on the Elburz Mountains. The child was saved from death by a griffin, who nursed and reared him (*see note to l. 679*). Later Sam repented of his conduct and received Zal back into favour. One day, while he was out hunting, Zal came to the foot of a tower 'on one of the turrets of which he saw a young damsel of the most

exquisite beauty. They mutually gazed and loved; but there appeared no mode of reaching the battlement. After much embarrassment, an expedient occurred to the maiden: she loosened her dark and beautiful tresses, which fell in ringlets to the bottom of the tower, and enabled the enamoured prince to ascend.' The lady proving to be a princess, a marriage was speedily arranged with the consent of all the parents. The child of this marriage was Rustum, whose great deeds have taken on an almost supernatural character in Persian story. It was this renowned hero, the friend and counsellor of kings, the idol of a people, a man invincible in battle, that the young Sohrab, his own son, was destined, all unknowingly, to fight against. Sohrab had allied himself with the enemies of Persia who were at that time united under the leadership of Afrasiab, the powerful Tartar king of Turan or Scythia (*see note to l. 38*). Whenever Persia was at war with another country, or torn within by civil strife, the Tartars used this opportunity for invasion by crossing the Oxus which was the boundary of the two countries. It was during one of these invasions, when, according to Arnold, Kai-Khosroo was ruling in Persia (*see note to l. 223*), that Sohrab encountered his father, Rustum.

1. 2. the Oxus: or Amu Daria, the great river of Central Asia which flows into the Aral Sea, and which was the boundary of Persia on the north-east.
1. 3. the Tartar: Tartar is used here to describe the Altaian peoples of both the Turkish and Mongol divisions. They were a nomadic people who inhabited from early times the steppes and deserts of Central Asia stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Khingan Mountains of Mongolia. The European name for the western area used to be Tartary and for the eastern, Chinese Tartary. The way of life of the Tartars was determined by the climatic conditions of this area which necessitated seasonal migrations from north to south. The steppes, which during the rainy season afforded good pasturage for cattle, were in winter covered with snow and uninhabitable. The southern area, as it is poor in water, was uninhabitable in summer, but provided suitable winter pasturage. Consequently, much of the lives of these peoples was spent in long wanderings from place to place, and only

from time to time under very strong rulers was any more settled habitation possible. Their travelling was done on horseback and their goods, consisting mainly of tents, rugs, cooking implements, and weapons, were carried on beasts of burden. Their horses, capable of immense endurance and speed, were very important to these nomad peoples, for not only did they carry them from place to place in their wanderings in search of pasturage or in their forays on neighbouring peoples, but they also provided their main drink *kumiz* (see note to l. 120). The organization of the nomads was loose. A few families formed a camp and wandered together. Sometimes a larger group gathered, and from time to time great hordes consisting of a variety of peoples, gathered together under some war leader and harried the settled communities on the fringes of the steppes. Persia or Iran, whose people were of Indo-European descent, suffered terribly from the inroads of the Tartars, especially when she was weak and unable effectively to defend herself.

1. 11. **Peran-Wisa:** the most trusted and famous of Afrasiab's commanders, now an old man with a reputation for wisdom like that of Homer's Nestor.
1. 15. **Pamere:** the Pamir Plateau in Central Asia.
1. 23. **a dome of laths:** the Tartar tent was very light and easy to erect. The framework was often constructed of a wooden lattice in several divisions, which could be opened out or pushed together for transport. This was surmounted by a roof frame with a circular opening which served for a chimney and to let in light. This aperture was closed only in very cold weather. The tent frame was covered with thick felts held in place by ropes of camel-hair.
1. 38. **King Afrasiab:** the King of Turan under whom at this time the Tartar hosts were united. See introductory note and note on the Tartars, l. 3.
1. 42. **Ader-baijan:** a district north-west of Persia between the Caspian Sea and Kurdistan; part of the ancient Tartary.
1. 82. **Seistan:** a region in Persia and Afghanistan watered by the River Helmund.
1. 82. **Zal:** See note to l. 679 and introductory note.
1. 101. **Kara-Kul:** a district of Turkestan near Bokhara.
1. 113. **Cashin:** probably the same name as the modern

Kazvin, a town on the south-western slopes of the Elburz Mountains.

1. 114. **Elburz:** the Elburz Mountains which encircle the southern coast plain of the Caspian Sea.
1. 117-40. **The Tartars . . . in burnish'd steel:** here is found a catalogue of the peoples who composed the two opposing armies. Such catalogues are common in ancient epic poetry, a very famous one occurring in the second book of Homer's *Iliad*. The attraction of foreign and little-known names was very great, and throughout early epic poetry considerable interest was taken in geography. This convention Arnold imitates here. In citing these names, he does not always distinguish between the ancient homes and names of these peoples and their more recent ones.
1. 119. **Bokhara:** a district west of the Pamir Plateau and between the two great rivers Oxus and Syr Daria.
1. 120. **Khiva:** a district of Turkestan south of the Aral Sea, watered by the Oxus.
1. 120. **ferment the milk of mares:** to make kumiz, a highly nourishing and intoxicating drink much esteemed by the Tartars. In summer when the milk of the mares was abundant, there was a large supply of kumiz. As this goes sour within a few hours, it must be drunk at once, so that during certain seasons those nomadic peoples who were rich in horses were drunk almost continuously.
1. 121. **the more temperate Toorkmans:** the Turkomans who possessed fewer horses and no studs of mares, and so had little kumiz on which to get drunk. This race, among whom Arnold includes the Tukas and the warriors of Salore, were a fierce predatory people, the most daring fighters, and the finest horsemen among the Tartars. Their usual weapon was the lance.
1. 123. **Attruck:** the River Atrek which flows into the south-east of the Caspian Sea.
1. 125. **acid milk of camels:** the camel was used largely by the Tartars as a beast of burden, and from its milk, certain of them, especially the Turkomans and Kara-Kalpaks who were poor in mares, fermented a drink, airan.
1. 128. **Ferghana:** a district of Turkestan between the Shian Shan and Pamir Plateau.

- l. 129. **Jaxartes**: a river of Asiatic Russia flowing into the Caspian Sea.
- l. 132. **Kalmucks**: Mongols of the Volga district.
- l. 132. **Kuzzacks**: the ancestors of the modern Cossacks, of Mongol descent.
- l. 133. **Kirghizzes**: probably the Kara-Kirghiz, the people of Eastern Turkestan, 'the region of Pamere'.
- l. 138. **Myats of Khorassan**: from the northern district of Persia bordering on Turkestan.
- l. 150. **Faroud**: the brother of King Kai-Khosroo.
- l. 160. **Cabool**: Kabul.
- ll. 178-9. **aloof he sits . . . apart**: this situation is reminiscent of the famous sulking of Achilles in the Iliad of Homer.
- l. 214. **his birth is hid**: Notice the dramatic irony in these lines.
- l. 217. **Iran**: Persia is from the Greek, *Persis*. The Persian name is Iran.
- l. 223. **Kai-Khosroo**: in Ferdosi's story of the period as recounted by Sir John Malcolm, it would seem that at the time of the meeting of Sohrab and Rustum, Kai-Kaoos, the grandfather of Kai-Khosroo was king. Kai-Khosroo had a romantic history. His father, Siawush, disgusted at the treachery of his father, Kai-Kaoos, had relinquished his command of the Persian army and joined the forces of the enemy Afrasiab. He married the daughter of Afrasiab but was murdered before their child was born. This child, Kai-Khosroo, was smuggled away from the Tartar court to save him from the jealous wrath of Afrasiab who had ordered his murder. He lived for many years the lowly life of a shepherd and was finally restored to his Persian grandfather Kai-Kaoos, who rejoiced at his return and abdicated in his favour.
- ll. 229-30. **For would . . . give I have**: here again the poet continues to use the device of dramatic irony to heighten the interest of the narrative. He uses it in ll. 244-5, 536-7, and again in ll. 641-2, immediately preceding the discovery by Rustum of Sohrab's identity.
- ll. 244-5. **and seeks thee**: notice the double meaning of these words. Sohrab seeks in mortal combat the bravest of the Persian warriors who, unknown to him, is that Rustum,

whom he seeks for another end, to claim him as his father.

1. 269. a plume . . . a plume: notice the effective use of balanced repetition in this line.
1. 277. dight: arrayed in, wearing.
1. 310. defying forth: challenging.
1. 412. Hyphasis or Hydaspes: the Greek names for two Himalayan rivers, tributaries of the Indus.
11. 480-524. Sun and Stars . . . The Clouds: here the poet makes the elements themselves conspire to heighten the tragic grandeur of the scene. Compare the storm scene in *King Lear*.
1. 570. glass her: mirror her.
1. 592. Koords: Kurds, first appeared about 2000 B.C. on the middle Tigris and still survive as a racial unit.
1. 596. bruited up: spread, reported.
1. 632. of age and looks . . . son: in age and appearance to be such as his son, if he had had one, would have been.
1. 679. Griffin: or gryphon, a mythological creature with the head, beak, wings and talons of an eagle, erect ears and body of a lion. Imaginary creatures of mixed form are a favourite motif in Asiatic art.
1. 679. Zal . . . whom they left to die: Zal, the father of Rustum was, as a child, exposed on the mountains, but was saved from death by a gryphon who found and reared him.
1. 751. River of Helmund: the river which flows from the mountains of Afghanistan through Seistan and to the great lake of Helmund, formerly called Zirrah.
1. 763. the desert rivers: the rivers of Turkestan west of the Oxus.
1. 765. northern Sir: Syr Daria in Turkestan, north of the Oxus or Amu Daria.
1. 766. yellow Oxus: yellow with the deposit of sand or silt.
1. 861. By Jemshid in Persepolis: Jemshid or Jemsheed was a great king of Persia, famous in the early history of that country. He built the fine city of Persepolis which is called Istahr or Tukht-e-Jemsheed, the throne of Jemshid by the Persians. This city was a centre of culture and luxurious living until Jemshid fell from power and was driven into exile by his successor. There remain now of all this fine

city but a few broken pillars to attest its former glory. In Fitzgerald's rendering of *The Rubaiyât of Omar Khayyâm* these same ruins are to the poet the very symbol of the fleeting nature of glory:

'They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep.'

It was during Jamshid's wanderings as a fugitive from his native land that he met and secretly married the princess of Seistan, whose son was the ancestor of Rustum.

11. 875-92. *But the majestic river . . . Aral Sea:* these last strong but tranquil lines suggest the very flow of the great river as it moved towards the sea. After the heat of battle, the fierce agony of death and remorse, this quiet, impersonal conclusion, this 'dying fall', comes gratefully to the mind of the reader.

SAUL

The story of how Saul, because he disobeyed the Lord, loses his favour and is condemned through the mouth of the prophet Samuel, is told in 1 Samuel xvi-xvii. Humiliated and cast down in spirit by the prophet's words, Saul withdrew to his own quarters and there remained in melancholy and inactive seclusion. At last, in despair, his friends and servants sent for a young harpist, the shepherd David, son of Jesse, to come and play to Saul, hoping that music, perhaps, would be able to rouse him from his despair. It is upon this story of David's playing before Saul that Browning's poem is founded, though much of the inspiration, especially for the culmination of the poem, is drawn from the Psalms, which are attributed to this same David.

David himself tells the story recounting what others spoke to him and what he himself saw, did, and sang, so that the whole has very great dramatic force. After the introductory description of David's coming to the King's presence (1-IV), there follows an account of the music and songs which David first plays to Saul, and the effect these have upon him (stanzas v-viii). The three great songs which follow this early group and form the body of the poem, are quoted in full (stanzas

ix, xiii, xvii-xviii). Between each song is inserted a description of Saul's reactions and of the ideas and emotions which inspire David's singing. The poem concludes (stanza xix) with an account of David's triumphant departure from Saul's tent, when the spirits of earth and heaven and all the birds and beasts rejoice at his prophecy.

Stanza i, l. 1. **Abner:** the son of Ner, and captain of Saul's army (1 Samuel xxvi. 5) addresses David in greeting.

I wished it: the 'I' here is David.

the King: Saul.

Stanza ii, l. 12. **thy gracious gold hair:** the Biblical description of David (1 Samuel xvi. 12) runs, 'Now he was ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look at.'

l. 13. **to twine round thy harp strings:** to keep them from cracking in the heat (*see* Stanza v).

Stanza iv, l. 31. **waiting his change:** change of skin.

Stanzas v-vi, l. 36. **and I first played . . . one family here:** these two stanzas form a quiet beginning to David's playing. The themes are such as appeal to the animals and birds and, in playing them to Saul, the musician seeks to awaken and harmonize, not his mind, but his instincts which he shares with all living creatures.

jerboa: a jumping hare.

Stanza vii, l. 49. **Then I played the help-tune of our reapers:** next comes a group of songs whose interest is centred in the everyday experiences of man in a primitive community, a song for the harvest, for a funeral or a wedding, or for a religious ceremony.

the Levites: the priests of Israel.

Stanza ix, l. 67. **Oh, our manhood's prime vigour:** the themes of the song described in this stanza (the first of the three great songs directly quoted) have moved away from the everyday external occasions of life to deal with man's inner feelings. David tries to tell King Saul that a man who is living a good life, finds life worth living.

l. 68. **not a muscle . . . in its playing:** in its movement.

l. 87. **thy brother . . . strained true:** Browning likens a young man's spiritual growth, which is promoted by contest with his fellows to the process of distilling (here called

'working') spirits such as brandy from wine or grapes. The words 'strained true' mean purified; this applies both to the liqueur and to the soul.

- ll. 93-4. **like the throe . . . gold go:** like the fault or internal strain which rends some living rock and causes it to bring forth its hidden gold, as a woman in labour brings forth a child. 'Throe', a fault in a rock, is more usually spelt 'throw'.

Stanza x, ll. 100-1. **The Lord's army . . . cherubim chariot:** as when the angel hosts in heaven are thrilled throughout their ranks in worship of God.

- l. 107. **the sheet:** the sheet of snow.

- l. 117. **released and aware:** released from his melancholy and free now to see and hear what was going on around him.

- l. 118. **What was gone . . . despair:** David was unsure of how much of Saul's melancholy had left him and how much remained. Then he realized that Saul had to be roused from despair to a feeling of hopefulness.

- l. 119. **Death was past, life not come:** Saul was in a condition of complete apathy between life and death.

- ll. 120-1. **forthwith to remand To their place:** immediately to send along the proper nerves to the brain whatever sensations the eyes received.

- l. 122. **I looked up . . . subsided:** Saul's eyes had lost their mad gleam, and now only resemble setting suns and so do not pain David when he looks at them. The body below them, chest and arms, in the darkness of the tent looms up like a mountain range seen against the light of the sunset with the lower slopes indistinct and shadowy.

- l. 125. **resolved:** fused, seeming to have melted into one whole.

Stanza xi, l. 129: **song filled . . . and the beauty:** David here refers to the songs he has already sung to Saul.

- l. 131. **beyond . . . perfect:** the sense is—how was I to find a further subject, beyond the mere good things of life, to help King Saul.

- l. 133. **commend them the cup:** recommend to them as highly desirable the drink they have rejected.

Stanza xii, l. 135. **Then fancies grew rife:** In stanzas xii-xiv, David describes to Saul the thoughts which had filled his

mind when, tending his sheep, he wandered over the lonely pastures. Here he sings not of the

'Mere mortal life held in common by man and by brute,'

but of the joys of the human spirit.

- l. 142. *Image the show: conjure up pictures in the mind, of the life of man.*

- l. 144. *Schemes of life . . . strive for: the last theme (l. 131) was the external physical strength and beauty of life; now David is to sing of spiritual values and begins with the lowest ones, the social and economic virtues of courage and prudence.*

Stanza XIII, l. 150. *In our flesh: the flesh, or the physical side of life is only valuable because it helps to produce and to support the 'fruits of the spirit'. The life of the spirit is higher than that of the flesh. The metaphor of the tree is elaborated in the sequel.*

- l. 152. *passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler: grew too tall first for the kid to nibble, then for the stag to graze it with its antlers.*

- l. 154. *Broke a-bloom: this part of the metaphor applies to mere physical beauty.*

- l. 155. *the good . . . palm-fruit: the palm-wine, which is here looked on as the purpose for which the tree grew and flowered, and so (ll. 157-9) excuses the tree's subsequent decay. Just so man's bodily decay is excused by the spiritual greatness it produces.*

- l. 159. *I pour thee such wine: I offer you the last and finest fruit of human life, the joys of the spirit.*

- l. 162. *when Inconscious, the life of a boy: when living the instinctive life of a boy. The same thought of the spiritual grandeur of old age. Browning has expressed most nobly in his poem, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*,*

'Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life for which the first was made.'

- l. 163: *'Crush . . . running!': the metaphor is that of pressing grapes to make wine. Saul's life is like a grape, and when crushed by age and weakness, its spiritual quality*

like wine shall stimulate whole nations, for his actions have influenced them and changed them for good.

- l. 171. **Carouse in the past!** Feast on, rejoice in your past and in the great fame you have achieved.
 - l. 172. **the license of age:** the amount of life allowed to the individual.
 - l. 175. **my soul-wine:** my spiritual message can even teach you to overcome the fear and the nothingness of death. Men's good 'lives after them'.
 - l. 177. **Is Saul dead?:** let us suppose that Saul is already dead and picture what happens in consequence. Men immediately busy themselves in making his name and his fame immortal.
 - l. 184. **spend:** expend, display.
 - l. 186-7. **the statesman's great word . . . comment:** statesmen and poets both will sing Saul's praises, in oratory and in verse.
 - l. 188. **smooth paper-reeds . . . rave:** the reeds serve as an instrument on which the loud winds prophesy in sound deeds which will afterwards come to be recorded on them in words, when they are made into paper. So the winds are prophetic of what is to be, and rave like seers.
- Stanza xiv, l. 191. **but O thou:** David interrupts his narration with a prayer to God to help him to finish his recital. It is easy to feel that Browning, too, the author, meant the prayer to be his own, and not simply an incident in the narrative. This interruption is, moreover, a well-known poetic device for giving the reader a pause, and a respite; and so it warns him that the climax of the piece is to follow. The device is borrowed from ancient Greek and Latin poetry.
- l. 192. **thy help to essay:** thy help in beginning and in carrying through an adventure.
 - l. 193-4: **my shield . . . word:** you who were my defence and my power when I sang before Saul ('in that act'), on which occasion you used my soul for your divine purposes, and put into my mouth the words you would have me say.
 - l. 195. **human endeavour:** human is emphatic. David is saying that he had come to the end of his own insight into God's purposes for Saul and the world: henceforth he will speak under inspiration.

- l. 197. the new stretch of heaven above me: the new and further mysteries of God's spiritual purposes for Saul and for mankind. Without such spiritual purposes, a man's death would be his end; with them, man attains not only immortality but the very throne of God. This is the meaning of the next line.
- l. 200. marvels: the wonderful experience of being God's inspired prophet.
- l. 203. Hebron: the most southern of the three cities of refuge west of Jordan.
- l. 204. Kidron: a brook near Jerusalem; this 'retrieves slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine' by refreshing the ground parched the day before.
- l. 206. assuring: fortifying.
- l. 207. Made a proffer of good: offered Saul (as expressed in stanza XIII) the spectacle of his own deeds and his fame among men as a consolation in his time of disaster and melancholy.
- l. 214. daily communion: daily converse with God and righteousness.
- ll. 214-15. and still . . . the same: though Saul's life and his appearance which you, the imaginary onlooker see before you, are wasted and ravaged ('spent'), they are now recognizable as those of the old Saul.
- l. 216. what a man may waste: man's spirit, his essential humanity.
- l. 228. in mild settled will: no longer erratic but master of his movements.
- l. 232. the sign: my message to Saul.
- l. 233. inventing a bliss: discovering a new blessing.
- ll. 234-6. I would add . . . moment: I would show him that he is possessed not merely of past greatness and future fame which I have already assured him of, but of immortality, where past, present, and future are all merged in one.
- l. 236. had love . . . dispense!: had love but the power to work its will.
- Stanza XVI, l. 237. Then the truth came upon me: David is suddenly inspired to prophesy the coming of Christ to earth.
- l. 238. Outbroke: there burst from me.
- Stanza XVII, l. 238. I have gone . . . creation: in his previous

songs, David says, he has dealt with every stage of created life, and analysed the good in it.

- ll. 240-1. returned him . . . censure: rendered him approval or blame for the works of his creation.
- l. 242. all's love, yet all's law: a favourite theme with Browning. It occurs in *The Guarding Angel*, stanza v.

'O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.'

- l. 244. has gained . . . asked: has found unplumbed depths instead of something easily comprehended as had been expected.
- l. 247. Do I task . . . success?: Do I exert the highest faculty I have (my imagination) to picture what I think would be for the best?
- l. 249. God is seen God, etc.: everything, stone, flesh, star, and soul is full of divine perfection beyond human imagining.
- l. 257. There's a faculty pleasant to exercise: David imagines for a moment that human love may be superior to God's, and so the one point where man may 'worst' or beat God. It is the purpose of this, the culminating passage of the poem, to emphasize the greatness of the love of God for man, and this theme is here dramatically introduced.
- l. 259. wot ye: know ye.
- l. 269. this man: King Saul.
- l. 278. succeed . . . night?: shew how the momentary check of death is followed by the dayspring of life eternal.
- ll. 283-5. a new harmony . . . run: a new scale of being yet to ascend or another phase of life yet to complete.
- l. 284. the man taught . . . sure: Saul will be taught enough by his life on earth to ensure his attaining the realities of the next world.

Stanza xviii. In this stanza David finally gives an unhesitating assertion of God's all-pervading greatness and love.

- l. 291. Sabaoth: hosts, armies from the Biblical phrase, 'Lord God of Sabaoth', the Lord of Hosts or Armies (from the Hebrew *sevaoth*, armies, hosts).
- l. 292. I will?: how can I, a mere man, will anything except what God wills?
- ll. 292-3. Why am I . . . face too?: Why hesitate to confess

even the impotence of my will? The poet is here speaking of the absorption of the whole personality in obedience to God.

- l. 295. 'tis not what man Does: this, too, is a characteristic theme of Browning's who saw good in all types of personality, and valued intention more than actual achievement. The same idea is expressed at greater length in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
 Called 'work', must sentence pass,
 Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
 O'er which, from level stand,
 The low world laid its hand,
 Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all the world's coarse thumb
 And finger failed to plumb,
 So passed in making up the main account;
 All instincts immature,
 All purposes unsure
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's
 amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed
 Into a narrow act,
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
 All I could never be,
 All, men ignored in me,
 This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

- l. 300. so wilt thou: in the person of Christ.
 l. 302. nor leave up . . . stand in: nor leave either high or low, any spot in creation where a creature may oppose God.
 ll. 303-4. It is by no breath . . . death!: no merely superficial action can save mankind from the annihilation of death.

- ll. 305-6. As thy Love is discovered . . . Beloved!: as God's love for all created beings is discovered to be all powerful in the world, so let his corresponding power of inspiring man to love him in return be proved.
- l. 307. He who did most: by creating and upholding the world, 'shall bear most' by suffering on the Cross in the person of his son Christ.
- l. 307. stand: be considered.
- ll. 308-9. my flesh . . . godhead!: what I desire most is to see God take on a human shape. The same idea is expressed by Browning in his poem on Karshish, the Arab physician who hears a voice from heaven saying to him:

'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!'

Stanza XIX, l. 316. repressed: pressed back.

- l. 328. with eye sidling still: with eyes looking furtively sideways from time to time but quickly averted.

GOBLIN MARKET

Unlike the other three narrative poems in this book, *Goblin Market* does not owe its plot to any famous ancient story. It is a purely imaginary theme having little connexion with the external world. All takes shape in the imagination of the poetess, and it is her skill to induce us to believe momentarily in this fanciful world of eerie little goblin creatures, mysterious comings and goings, magic fruits and baneful influences. Yet in spite of its fanciful theme, the poem glows with a vivid sense of the colour, shape, and movement of all living things, the bright beauty of the external world.

- l. 9. bloom-down-cheeked: this composite adjective very effectively conveys the idea of the colour and texture of peach-skin.

1. 10. **swart-headed mulberries:** the dark-purple berries of the mulberry.
1. 22. **sharp bullaeas:** hard, round, dark-purple or yellow plums, which are 'sharp', that is, sour or acid.
1. 27. **barberries:** small dark red or purple berries from the barberry shrub.
1. 75. **like a wombat . . . furry:** a simile which gives an air of strangeness to these sub-human creatures. The wombat is a small animal of the kangaroo family. The introduction of a goblin resembling an animal native to another continent and later, the mention of the 'ratel' native to South Africa, enhances the feeling that these apparitions are creatures of no one land or place but of a non-human world where mere geographical limitations do not operate. 'Obtuse', preceding 'furry' may have its literal meaning, softly rounded, not pointed, or its figurative meaning, stupid, groping, or perhaps a combination of the two. By this means we have packed into a few words a picture of a strange, nocturnal creature, round and furry, prowling about in a stupid, groping manner.
1. 76. **ratel:** a ratel mouse, a creature resembling a badger with grey upper and black under parts, (South African Dutch *ratel-muis*).
1. 77. **like voice of doves:** to make these weird creatures of the night produce a sound like the cooing of doves, which is usually associated with pleasant domestic scenes adds, by contrast, a further touch of strangeness to the picture.
1. 215. **slow evening:** the evening that to Laura, who waited for it so impatiently, had been slow in coming.
1. 258. **succous pasture:** succose or juicy food.
1. 259. **gone deaf and blind:** unable to hear or see.
1. 300. **cankrous care:** care that consumed her as a canker.
1. 461. **windy-paced:** perhaps, swift as the wind.
1. 562. **For there is . . . sister:** this line indicates that a tribute was intended to Christina's elder sister, Maria Francesca. The original title of the poem ran, '*A Peep at the Goblins—To M. F. R.*'

